Passion of Love:

Scheler’s Understanding of Love as a Response to Nietzsche’s Critique of Christian Morality

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I. Nietzsche’s Perfection of Atheism

The nineteenth and twentieth centuries are bound to be judged historically as being under a spell, during which modern atheism, rooted in a radical stream of the Enlightenment, mounted a savage assault on the belief in God in general and on the Christian faith in particular. Irrespective of its sometimes strong humanitarian concern, this woeful spell caused pervasive and excruciating calamities in the twentieth century in the extreme form of totalitarianism. Whether this telling movement is now really on the wane, or even put to rout by the resurgence of religion at the end of the last century, remains open to dispute. It is, however, by and large fair to deem Friedrich Nietzsche as a prophet of

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modern atheism due to his profound influence on shaping the development of atheism in the twentieth century. Karl Löwith confers upon Nietzsche the laureate of perfecting atheism, in view of his great service as compared to the contributions of atheists before him. Ludwig Feuerbach, who represents the zenith reached in the nineteenth century by the atheism descending from radical Enlightenment, directs a powerful polemic against God, dislodging Him from His throne and setting human beings as Lord in lieu of Him. For Feuerbach, the virtues customarily attributed to God, such as love, sympathy, justice, goodness, should not be abolished. He seems content with reaping the benefit of Christianity without recourse to God, who is traditionally considered to be the sole source of virtues. Repudiating so categorically the need of the subject and keeping its predicate intact, Feuerbach epitomizes the prevalent thinking of the atheists in the nineteenth century.  


3 “Hence he alone is the true atheist to whom the predicates of the Divine Being, — for example, love, wisdom, justice, — are nothing; not he to whom merely the subject of these predicates is nothing.” In this sense Feuerbach did not consider himself an atheist. See Ludwig Feuerbach, The Essence of Christianity, trans. George Eliot (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957), 21. “And in no wise is the negation of the subject necessarily also a negation of the predicates considered in themselves. These have an intrinsic independent reality; they force their recognition upon man by their very nature; they are self-evident truths to him; they prove, they attest themselves” (ibid.).

4 Owen Chadwick correctly indicates this ethos in the second half of the nineteenth century in Europe. “The burden sat heavier because nearly everyone, agnostic or not, assumed that the morality which they inherited was absolute and must be preserved, even though the creed linked with it might be dropped. The most militant of French anticlericals, fighting in the 1870s and 1880s for a lay and non-religious education in the schools, wanted a moral education
This cultural circumstance makes an enormous impact on the philosophical formation of young Nietzsche. Nevertheless, he also perspicaciously sees this atheistic attempt to uphold the incompatibility between subject and its predicate as logically untenable and thus doomed to failure at the outset. Precluding himself from committing the modern atheists’ mistakes of going only halfway, Nietzsche feels obligated to continue their project to the full by blazing a trail in disposing of those traditional virtues and laying a new basis for constructing virtues kindred to his Übermensch and compatible with the new cultural environment where no place is conceded to God. Dispersed from the modern world and shorn of any significance, God is deprived of any right to afford human beings the tablets of morality. Without being nourished by a divine fount, Christian virtues are bereft of their justification in a modern world. In a nutshell, Nietzsche’s critique of morality, and especially of Christian morality, is in essence an extension of the critique of Christianity in the nineteenth century, where its focus is switched from the subject to the predicate. His critique of religion outshines resoundingly those preceding him because nobody in the nineteenth century is able to ponder more judiciously and coherently the consequence of repudiating God than Nietzsche, through whose effort the project of the modern

which agreed in every respect (but religious background) with Christian moral education” (Owen Chadwick, The Secularization of the European Mind in the 19th Century [Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1975], 231–32).

atheism makes considerable strides in the twentieth century.

To gauge adequately Nietzsche’s accomplishment in modern atheism, the basis for his new virtues must be taken into consideration. Nietzsche’s seminal role in modern philosophical discussion on morality lies as much in his demolishing the traditional virtues ingrained in the modern man as in his erecting a new foundation for the virtues of his Übermensch. Nietzsche’s moral philosophy opens new vistas in modern moral thinking mainly because he not only dissociates virtues from a divine source, but he also jettisons any sources of morality external to human beings. Nietzsche considers every moral decision as an occasion for a person to execute her will to power by affirming her own being and getting over anything recalcitrant to or militating against her will.

What is good?—Everything that heightens the feeling of power, the will to power, power itself in man. What is bad? — Everything that stems from weakness. What is happiness? — The feeling that power is increasing—that a resistance is overcome.⁶

Any attempt to seek a moral foundation either in the Christian God, or in the Greek order of being, or in the nature pervasive in the cosmos, is perilous to the affirmation of one’s inner being and must be negated. To one who intends to execute her own will, these external moral sources, which lead a human being astray by relinquishing her own inner affirmation and simply following suit, appear as various kinds of overbearing power.

In particular, Nietzsche launches an attack with great vehemence on Christian love as a symbol of Christian morality. For

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him, this love is akin to modern altruistic love, which came to the fore in the nineteenth century and has been advocated with great eagerness by many atheists since then. Nietzsche sees Christian love as the virtue of slaves, and holds Christians culpable for rendering human beings degenerating. In his genealogical account of the emergence of Christian morality, Christians are understood as slaves who are oppressed by the nobles and unable to realize their own will to power. On the contrary, the nobles are those who are able to execute their own will to power. In the combat with the nobles, the slaves feel overwhelmed by a sense of powerlessness, which fosters resentment towards the nobles and further drives them to fight with the nobles.

The beginning of the slaves’ revolt in morality occurs when resentiment itself turns creative and gives birth to values: the resentiment of those beings who, denied the proper response of action, compensate for it only with imaginary revenge. Whereas all noble morality grows out of a triumphant saying ‘yes’ to itself, slave morality says ‘no’ on principle to everything that is ‘outside’, ‘other’, ‘non-self’: and this ‘no’ is its creative deed.7

Driven by this powerlessness and resentment, the slaves stage a revolt against the nobles by inventing a moral account in which love is good, divine, and worthy of being pursued. Through the wonderful fabrication made by the slaves, the nobles are eventually convinced by this Christian account, and now they also crave Christian love instead of enacting their own moral law (i.e., the nobles give up their own will to power and succumb to the intrigue of the slaves). Nietzsche describes it as “the slave’s

revolt in morality.”\(^8\) Stephen Darwall explains it very neatly: “Thus what was naturally superior becomes morally inferior. And what was naturally inferior becomes morally superior.”\(^9\) Driven by their powerlessness, Christians develop a reactive resentment against their rivals. In Nietzsche’s opinion, this resentment, rather than divine inspiration, is the authentic spiritual root of Christian love.

It seems to me that Dante made a gross error when, with awe-inspiring naïvety he placed the inscription over the gateway to his hell: “Eternal love created me as well”: —at any rate, this inscription would have a better claim to stand over the gateway to Christian Paradise and its “eternal bliss”: “Eternal hate created me as well” —assuming that a true statement can be placed above the gateway to a lie!\(^10\)

It merits attention that Nietzsche accuses Christian love of being rooted in the soil of resentment, subverting the traditional Christian moral understanding that resentment is a vile moral feature. Of importance is that this resentment hampers the realization of one’s will to power. The slaves use this trick to win their fight with the noble at the expense of not realizing their own will to power. Precisely this forgetfulness and inability to execute one’s will to power is the fundamental reason why Nietzsche fiercely denounces Christian love. In the light of this analysis, only by aspiring to affirm one’s own inner being in moral decisions and refusing to cling to Christian love or any other external sources, can the nobles throw off the shackles of servitude and become their own masters.\(^11\)

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8 Ibid., 19.  
11 Strictly speaking, Nietzsche does not necessarily reject all performances driven
Charles Taylor notes and lauds the perspicacity of Nietzsche’s moral thinking and his criticism of Christian morality.

If morality can only be powered negatively, where there can be no such thing as beneficence powered by an affirmation of the recipient as a being of value, then pity is destructive to the giver and degrading to the receiver, and the ethic of benevolence may indeed be indefensible. Nietzsche’s challenge is on the deepest level, because he is looking precisely for what can release such an affirmation of being.\(^\text{12}\)

But at the same time, Taylor does not fail to discern where the Achilles heel of Nietzsche’s whole argument lies. “Only if there is such a thing as agapē, or one of the secular claimants to its succession, is Nietzsche wrong.”\(^\text{13}\)

**II. Scheler’s Phenomenology of Emotion**

Max Scheler (1874–1928), considered by Martin Heidegger as the strongest philosophical force among his contemporaries\(^\text{14}\) and by Ernst Troeltsch as the “Catholic Nietzsche,”\(^\text{15}\) is entirely cognizant by Christian or altruistic love. However, these performances must have an origin other than both of them. “The noble person helps the unfortunate too, although not (or hardly over) out of pity, but rather more out of an impulse generated by the over-abundance of power.” (Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Judith Norman [Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2002], 154).


\(^\text{13}\) Ibid.


\(^\text{15}\) Ernst Troeltsch, *Der Historismus und seine Probleme* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1922), 609.
of how formidable a challenge Nietzsche poses to Christianity, a challenge that puts the foundation of Christian morality into question. Without losing sight of Nietzsche’s penetrating critique, Scheler, like Taylor, keenly takes note of the strength and weakness of Nietzsche’s critique of Christian morality. The cogency of Nietzsche’s arguments is bound up with the question whether divine love in fact exists, and Scheler is unalteringly persuaded that it does. In his philosophical analysis of love, and in particular of Christian love, Scheler uses the phenomenological method which he learned from Husserl, and made a name for himself as a phenomenologist in his own right. He cautiously scrutinizes the Christian understanding of love, partially in response to the critique of Nietzsche. In his celebrated essay, *Das Ressentiment im Aufbau der Moralen*, Scheler refutes Nietzsche’s verdict on Christian love, interestingly not so much by asserting the fallacy of Nietzsche’s argument, but by claiming that Nietzsche mistakenly identifies Christian love with altruistic love.

The profound inner difference between the facts and concepts of Christian and those of humanitarian love seems to have escaped Nietzsche completely. He failed to realize that everywhere many demands made in the name of humanitarian love were different from the spirit of Christian love and often diametrically opposed to it.\(^{16}\)

More surprisingly, through Scheler’s analysis, a genuine Christian love basically squares with the temperament of *Übemensch* purposed by Nietzsche. It is the task of this article to demonstrate that Scheler’s perception of Christian love does stand closer to Nietzsche’s *Übemensch* than to the humanitarian love espoused

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by modern altruists.

Scheler’s critique of Nietzsche is to be considered as an extension of his phenomenology of emotion, which can be traced back to his critique of Kant’s formalistic understanding of ethics. He perceives that one of the main errors at the very core of Kant’s formal ethics is that Kant mistakenly identifies “non-formal” with “sensible content” and the “a priori” with what is thought. In Kant’s formal ethics, this sensible content, when compared with form-giving activities of the mind, appears chaotic and hence should not be employed as a solid ground for ethics. Scheler explicitly repudiates this position: “As I see it, the πρῶτον ψευδός of this identification is that one asks what can be given instead of simply asking what is given.” In this sense, priority is given in Kant’s system to the possibility of knowledge rather than the actuality of knowledge. Basically, Scheler calls this modern paradigm into question and accuses Kant of overlooking something which has already been given in reality. He finds that Kant has misunderstood the nature of experience, and hence he is unable to thematize the consciousness of something or the existence of phenomenological experience, which is prior to empirical experience.

17 “This error is closely connected with another one, namely, Kant’s identification of the ‘non-formal’ (in both the theory of cognition and ethics) with ‘sensible [sinnlichen] content,’ and the ‘a priori’ with what is ‘thought’ or what has been an addition to such ‘sensible content’ by way of ‘reason’.” (Max Scheler, Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Values, trans. Manfred S. Frings and Roger L. Funk [Evanston: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1973], 54).

18 Scheler, Formalism, 55.

19 In regard to the critique of modern paradigm, Karl Barth stands very close to Scheler; namely, both of them see that priority should be given to actuality of knowledge rather than possibility of knowledge, though one sees this actuality given in phenomenological emotion, the other in the Word of God. See Christoph Schwöbel, “Theology,” in The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth, ed. John Webster (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2000), 29–30.
Scheler is convinced that this consciousness of something or phenomenological experience prior to empirical experience comes forth in the realm of human emotion and value. Any human emotion, Scheler argues, empirically pertains to value. Consider, for instance, a sense of pleasure produced by having a good meal or a feeling of freshness generated by walking in the woods on a sunny winter morning. Both of these experiences refer to the empirical existence of sensual value or the value of vitality. Or in listening to Mahler’s Symphony No. 2, we empirically experience the value of aesthetic beauty, which is different from the value of sensuality or vitality. More important yet is the phenomenological relationship between emotion and value. At the moment of injustice, for instance, indignation seizes us. The emotion of indignation occurs when justice, as a value, is empirically lacking. However, in the course of our indignation, the value of justice is intended and in phenomenological fashion comes into existence. The value of justice is present and immediately given along with our emotion of indignation.20 In Scheler’s opinion, the phenomenological existence

20 Manfred Frings offers a lucid example to explain this phenomenological relationship between emotion and value. “Let us suppose that while taking a walk we see suddenly a person who draws our immediate attention and we do not know why this person stands out so much from all others. Let us also suppose that at a split second we may realize that this person to be just a dummy. There are two components in such an experience of deception. First there was a live person and then there was an inanimate dummy. Yet, the dummy was first experienced as ‘alive’ and without mediation. The aliveness (das Lebendigsein) of the person was an unmediated or intuited ‘content’ in the deception of the dummy. The apriority in this deceptive experience is the self-given phenomenon of aliveness despite there having been a dummy” (Manfred S. Frings, The Mind of Max Scheler [Milwaukee, WI: Marquette Univ. Press, 1997], 36–37). In this example, the aliveness of the dummy is immediately given in the course of deceiving and undeceiving. Even though empirically there is no such thing as aliveness in the dummy, this aliveness intentionally appears in our
of justice is prior to our feeling of indignation, in spite of the empirical non-existence of justice. He contends that this intentional value prior to the empirical emergence of emotion is objective. This objective value is of great service in constructing a foundation for a non-formal ethics that can supersede Kant’s formal ethics, about which we cannot go into detail here.

On the basis of this understanding of the empirical and phenomenological relationship between emotion and value, Scheler further erects his edifice of phenomenology of emotion. Scheler comes to the view that human emotions arise in an astonishing variety, which are neither chaotic, capricious nor one-dimensional. On the contrary, governed by a stringent objective law, emotions suggest a hierarchy with four strata extending from the lowest to the highest: sensual, of life, mental, and spiritual. In each of these, both positive and negative emotions can be found. In view of different stratifications, positive and negative emotions with varied forms and qualities can appear simultaneously and cannot be reduced to quantitative constituents. In the light of Scheler’s insight, utilitarianism appears unsustainable because it simply wipes out the qualitative variations of emotions, erroneously reduces them to a single element, and sums them up as a quantitative whole. Scheler suggests that values appear accordingly as a hierarchy with four strata in an ascending order:

consciousness of the dummy as a living being and of the dummy as itself. This aliveness as a value, which intentionally exists prior to our empirical emotional experience, is in Scheler’s opinion a solid foundation to morality.


22 Scheler, Formalism, 332.
pleasant or unpleasant, noble or mean, for the soul, holy and unholy.\textsuperscript{23} The higher the stratum of value reached, and the more centrally it is involved with human existence, the more profound an emotion is provoked. For example, a delicious feast brings forth a feeling of sensual pleasure, which is situated in the lowest stratum of emotion, so the pleasure comes to a halt as the feast is finished. In contrast, the anguish of losing a daughter is by no means easily overcome in the course of time.

In fact, the hierarchies of emotion and value are related to different dimensions of a human being.

All “feelings” possess an experienced relatedness to the ego (or to the person). . . . Yet, this general relatedness of feelings to the ego is, in each of the above four types of feelings, a fundamentally and essentially different relatedness.\textsuperscript{24}

In a nutshell, the lower strata of emotion and value concern the bodily and psychical ego. Only the highest strata, spiritual emotion and the holy and unholy value, principally bear upon the person, which is a pivotal concept in Scheler’s anthropology. The person is located in the center of the human being, commanding all of one’s acts, uniquely integrating them into a unity. “For the person is precisely that unity which exists for acts of all possible essential differences insofar as these acts are thought to be executed.”\textsuperscript{25} The person is the foundation of all essentially different acts, which cannot be reduced to a functional psychical ego. Thus, Scheler comes to the conviction that people are occupied either by love or hate or other emotions of a higher order, command and integrate their own acts accordingly as a coherent whole and eventually also

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  \item \textsuperscript{23} Ibid., 104–10.
  \item \textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 332–33.
  \item \textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 382–83.
\end{itemize}
determine their destiny.

Scheler finds the strata of emotion enjoying an asymmetrical relation, in which the higher stratum wields considerable influence on the lower stratum in regard to how an emotion can be felt. Their relation, however, is not reciprocal; the lower has no impact on the higher. He emphasizes this point by exquisitely distinguishing two types of feelings, \textit{Gefühlzustand} and \textit{Fühlen}.

The difference between them is that the former is a state of feeling, the latter an intentional act of feeling; however, the significance of this distinction, which is often hastily neglected, is much subtler than that at first glance. Scheler is of the opinion that the sensual feeling is by nature a \textit{state} of feeling, the emergence of which wholly depends on the empirical emergence of the object (\textit{Gegenstand}), which brings forth the corresponding value. Referring to the example above, the sensual pleasure entirely hinges on savoring the luscious food. In contrast, the spiritual feeling is thoroughly an \textit{act} of intentional feeling, which has nothing to do with the presence of an object. It is a feeling act \textit{intended} to the object of emotion and initiated in the center of a human being, namely the person. Through exerting influence on the person, the spiritual feeling as the highest stratum of emotion is of great importance in determining how the emotions in the lower strata are felt. Imagine that a person who has lost her daughter takes a delicious meal. The sensual pleasure engendered by the meal is now perceived only under the absolute command of her anguish. Anguish as a feeling act situated in the highest stratum of emotion is \textit{intended} in the course of luxuriating in the food and commands the feeling state of the latter. On the contrary, this sensual pleasure cannot dilute her anguish in the slightest. The other two strata of emotion are located between these two poles.

\begin{footnote}{26 Ibid., 253–54.}\end{footnote}
III. Priority of Love over Goodness

In order to grasp the meaning of Christian love expressed in different discourses, Scheler turns to the Greek idea of *eros* as a background to his analysis. Scheler sees the difference between these two ancient understandings of love as lying simply in their different answers to the question: Is there a love of goodness itself (*eine Liebe selbst zum Guten*)?

The primary question is surely whether there is any such thing as a love of goodness per se? This, as I have elsewhere shown, marks the great turning-point between the ancient and the Christian conceptions of love.27

In Plato’s *Symposium*, where the Greek deity Eros is eulogized by Socrates and his friends at a banquet, the conspicuous nature of *eros* is clearly set forth in the dialogue between the priestess Diotima and Socrates. Deprived of being good and beautiful, Eros is essentially not a god but a demon fervidly yearning for goodness and beauty, and thus it is a mediator between gods and men, constantly consigned to a plight of poverty. Scheler finds the Greek idea of *eros*, with this plight of poverty, indefatigably aspiring after goodness. However, once goodness is acquired, *eros* is no longer required and its value evaporated. *Eros* is love toward goodness; however, its value is subsidiary to that of goodness. In a word, the divine is the *object* of love, but not love *itself*. In the course of the encounter between these two ancient thoughts, the Greek *eros* finds itself rejected by the Christian understanding of love. In Scheler’s opinion, *agape*, namely the Christian idea of love, in *essence* in diametrical opposition to the Greek *eros*. In line with

the tradition of Augustinian theology, Scheler grants priority to love rather than the object of love and sheds light on its significance. *Agape* itself is in the first place good and by no means hinges upon its object. Otherwise, it would lose its divinity and no longer could be regarded as *summum bonum.* “If such a thing as a genuine love of goodness were possible, love itself could never possess the value of moral goodness in the most ultimate sense.”

Although the priority given to love does not amount to a denial of the existence of a love toward goodness, the shift in emphasis is indubitably telling. As long as *agape* prevails, the significance of the object of love itself is of little importance; that is, even if the object of love is not necessarily good, *agape* can still be directed at it. In this regard, Nietzsche’s accusation that Christian morality gives rise to a degenerate life seems initially not quite unfounded.

The priority given to love over its object will prove itself a solid footing for explaining another crux of the Christian understanding of love, “a reversal in the movement of love” (*die Bewegungsumkehr der Liebe*), which Scheler once again articulates lucidly in opposition to the Greek concept of *eros.* In Scheler’s opinion, *agape* is opposed to *eros* on account of the direction of their movements. As a driving force craving for goodness, *eros* represents a direction, metaphorically speaking, steering upwards, disposing of the lower value and longing for the higher ones. Those imbued with *eros* concern themselves chiefly with how to pursue goodness without being tainted by something mean or vulgar. Such an attitude of caution against being contaminated by what is inferior naturally conjures up the narratives about the life of Jesus. According to the Gospels, Jesus was often found among the poor, the sick and the sinners, in whom Greek *eros* is

28 Ibid., 163.
29 Scheler, *Ressentiment,* 65.
not at all interested. Scheler also refers to St. Francis of Assisi’s examples and how he got along with the poor and the sick. Among our contemporaries, we are reminded of those emotive stories about Mother Teresa. It is beyond dispute that many of the saints in church history have engaged with those not especially appealing in society. Scheler calls this, in contrast to the Greek idea of love, an inverted movement of love, through which he calls Nietzsche’s genealogical account of Christian morality into question. Did Jesus associate with the poor, the sick and the sinners only because he could not affirm his being to such an extent that he did not dare to approach the noble, the healthy, or the righteous? Or did St. Francis of Assisi, sustaining a deficiency of self-trust, consciously or unconsciously intend to gain it back by situating himself among the poor and the sick? Or was our Saint perverse to such an astounding extent that he relished kissing the suppurating lesions of the poor?

Scheler finds any attempt to ascribe the acts of the saint to dearth of self-trust groundless, untenable, and unjust, since any such attempt, including Nietzsche’s, loses sight of other alternative explanations. Jesus and St. Francis of Assisi had not the slightest fear of being corrupted in their contact with those who were deemed inferior. This is not due to their paucity of power in affirming their being or their insufficiency of self-trust, but, entirely on the contrary, this comes out of an overflowing of their being and absolute self-trust. Here, Scheler makes a strong case. Both Jesus and St. Francis mingled with the poor completely at ease, reminiscent of the composure and absolute self-trust imputed to his Übermensch by Nietzsche. In contrast, that those urged by the Greek eros harbored misgivings about being defiled by those deemed inferior precisely suggests a want of such self-trust.

In Scheler’s opinion, Christian love demonstrates such a powerful strength in the lives of those Christian saints, transforming a person to such a degree that one is able to
surmount all the unpleasantness or even disgust occasioned by contact with anything or anyone inferior, that it can by no means be generated by resentment or from any kind of reaction to one’s powerlessness. Only divine love could provoke St. Francis of Assisi to overcome his human nature to such a marvelous extent. According to the stratified structure of Scheler’s phenomenology of emotion, divine love pertains to the highest stratum of emotion, and, being situated in the person (i.e., in the center of a human being), exerts considerable impact on the feeling felt in the lower strata. In this sense, the way in which St. Francis of Assisi got along with the sick and the poor is not as perverse and ludicrous as it might seem at first glance.

In addition, Scheler argues that agape also opens our eyes to see something not visible to normal people. Christian love empowers us to unearth loftier values veiled beneath somebody or something mean or inferior. He disputes the traditional understanding, according to which love is a mere impulse of sensual passion that makes us blind. He argues that it is sensual impulses, rather than love, that make us blind. Instead, Christian love enjoys a discovery power to discern higher values among the lower. “It can certainly be said that true love opens our spiritual eyes to ever-higher values in the object loved. It enables them to see and does not blind them.”\(^30\) Scheler comes to the conviction that agape furnishes us with the ability to see more penetratingly and to perceive values higher than those which our interest alone would discern. Whereas normal people like us merely catch a glimpse of a filthy beggar forlornly lying in the dirt, Mother Teresa sees underneath his squalor something holy, possessing dignity and vitality. Agape is directed towards the “enhancement of value”\(^31\);
it is different from the movement of Greek *eros*, which is directed towards a higher value. *Agape* is directed toward objects with even lower values but discloses the higher values hidden underneath. Inspired by this insight into *agape*, Scheler understands the basic character of love as follows:

[Love] is that movement wherein every concrete individual object that possesses value achieves the highest value compatible with its nature and ideal vocation; or wherein it attains the ideal state of value intrinsic to its nature.\(^{32}\)

In a nutshell, Scheler does not deny that *agape* indeed renders Christians capable to associate with someone inferior. However, contrary to Nietzsche’s opinion, on no account does it boil down to a degenerate life. Rather, those overwhelmed by *agape* are granted an exuberant power and they impressively realize their own being through prevailing over their human nature, namely, getting over the unpleasant feeling of engaging with those inferior. This can be explained by the discovery power of *agape* to bring about the continuous emergence of ever-higher value in the object of love. In this regard, anyone seized by *agape* enjoys a kind of disposition similar to that of Nietzsche’s *Übermensch*. Thus,

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\(^{32}\) Ibid., 161. Edward C. Vacek correctly indicates this discovery power of love is fundamentally related to the production of arts and the creation of God. “As a creative movement, love is not bound to what actually already exists. When an artist is stirred to create, she is drawn by an object which does not yet exist and which, without her, will not exist, yet whose distinctive nature she must respect even as she works to discover it and draw it into being. She loves the ‘to-become-real’ object, and in the love she then acts to give it reality. The primordial and foundational instance of this love is God’s love for creation” (Edward C. Vacek, *Love, Human and Divine* [Washington, DC: Georgetown Univ. Press, 1994], 56).
Scheler powerfully refutes Nietzsche’s polemic against Christian morality.

**IV. Scheler’s Criticism of Altruism**

The consonance between *agape* and the dispositions of Nietzsche’s *Übermensch* becomes further palpable when Scheler formulates his criticism of modern altruism. He rebukes any attempt to align *agape* with the altruistic understanding of love or to put forward any notion considering them as analogous with each other. Such notions have enjoyed wide currency since the second half of the nineteenth century. In Scheler’s opinion, Christian *agape* and altruistic love are fundamentally at variance with each other.

The pathos of modern humanitarianism, its clamor for greater sensuous happiness, its subterraneously smoldering passion, its revolutionary protest against all institutions, traditions, and customs which it considers as obstacles to the increase of sensuous happiness, its whole revolutionary spirit — all this is in characteristic contrast to the luminous, almost cool spiritual enthusiasm of Christian love.\(^{33}\)

Scheler finds any amalgamation of these two types of love suffering from grave defects because the subjects and predicates of two opposing notions are mistakenly amalgamated. Nietzsche dares to carry his atheistic belief to its logical consequence and refutes any predicate unfaithful to its subject. In a similar vein, but in the opposite direction, Scheler flatly declines altruism, which proves itself foreign to the notion of having God as its subject. Scheler considers the altruism in question, which is chiefly epitomized by Auguste Comte or Feuerbach in the nineteenth

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33 Scheler, *Ressentiment*, 93.
century, an idea bred by an atheism which, as mentioned in our first part, covets the fruits of divinity without recourse to God. Scheler’s case becomes clear when Comte’s altruism comes under scrutiny. Though being an advocate of positivism, Comte founded the religion of humanity in his later life and paid homage to his Grand-Être, i.e., Humanity with a capital letter. The moral goodness of a humanist like Comte is to love this Great Being and serve the abstract humanity, similar to the Christian love and the service to God. Inspired by Nietzsche’s genealogical account of love, Scheler sees this altruistic love as a reaction triggered by a repressed hatred towards God.

The humanitarian movement is in its essence a ressentiment phenomenon, as appears from the very fact that this socio-historical emotion is by no means based on a spontaneous and original affirmation of a positive value, but on a protest, a counter-impulse (hatred, envy, revenge, etc.) against ruling minorities that are known to be in the possession of positive values. ‘Mankind’ is not the immediate object of love . . . — it is merely a trump card against a hated thing.34

Scheler’s description of altruism is on no account just a sleight of hand for duping the readers. On the basis of their different origins, Scheler further argues that the nature of altruistic love is essentially at variance with the Christian understanding of love, and it will eventually lead to degenerate life for an individual and agony for a society. Whereas Christianity inculcates loving a concrete person (your neighbor) intrinsically endowed with immense value, altruism proclaims loving humanity, in which every individual is treated as an abstract entity subordinate to another abstract summation of all

34 Ibid., 98.
individuals — humanity. If the quantitative dimension of humanity is emphasized with scant regard to the invaluable significance of an individual human being, then the latter is always exposed to the peril of being engulfed by humanity. In modern altruism, one’s value is readily immolated for the sake of this Great Being.

‘Universal love of mankind’ becomes progressively more powerful until the French Revolution, when one head after another was struck off ‘in the name of mankind’.  

In this regard, Scheler’s analysis accurately foresees the calamity in the twentieth century principally motivated by an ideology closely kindred to altruism.

In his criticism of altruism, Scheler pays not so much attention to its detrimental effect on society as its effect on an individual. He heaps criticisms on altruism as emphasizing merely the sensual dimension of a human being without being pertinently cognizant of one’s spiritual aspect. Being compelled by its atheistic origin and thus finding itself in defiance of God, altruism is, in Scheler’s judgment, committed to an ignorance of the spiritual dimension of human beings. Of course, it also has no awareness of the intricate significance of how the higher stratum of human emotion, and in particular agape, bears upon the lower stratum. Thus, the love advocated by an altruist invariably revolves around the sensual well-being of the human being.

The value of love [i.e., of universal love of mankind] is not supposed to lie in the salvation of the lover’s soul as a member of the kingdom of God, and in the ensuing contribution to the salvation of others, but in the advancement of ‘general welfare’.  

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35 Ibid., 96.
36 Ibid., 94.
There is hardly a characteristic of altruistic love more removed from the crux of the Christian understanding of love than its total immersion in human sensuality. Scheler finds such an understanding of love ludicrous. He is right in saying that, in the system of altruism, love turns out to be superfluous in a socialist utopia. In this kind of utopia, the sensual well-being is best taken care of by providing for the material needs of human beings. In such a circumstance, love is to no avail for improving the material well-being of a person and hence can be scrapped. Precisely in this respect, the affinity between altruism and the Greek idea of love can hardly be overlooked. Both of them see love as a medium for seeking something more significant than love. Once these aims, whether the goodness in Plato’s order of being or sensual well-being in altruism, are successfully pursued, love is of no service and thus is to be discarded. However, the similarity between them is as evident as their disparity. In alignment with Nietzsche, Scheler delivers his verdict on altruism — that it renders human beings decadent. Whereas eros incites in one the pursuit of the nobler and loftier values, an altruist is, on the contrary, content with dwelling in sensual pleasure, the lowest stratum of emotion and value.

Scheler charges that Nietzsche has committed an injustice to agape because he, like most of his contemporaries, carelessly mixes up two kinds of love as affiliated and fails to properly come to grips with their diverse essences. The following is his judgment on Nietzsche’s critique of Christian morality and modern altruism:

Nietzsche is perfectly right in pointing out that this way of living and feeling is morbid, a sign of declining life and hidden nihilism, and that its ‘superior’ morality is pretense. His criticism, however, does not touch the Christian love of one’s neighbor: it does touch an essential component of modern ‘love of mankind,’ which is in effect fundamentally a socio-psychological
phenomenon of degeneration.\textsuperscript{37}

Scheler argues that the Christian saints have dispositions akin to those possessed by Nietzsche’s \textit{Übermensch}, since both of them enjoy a sense of self-trust and inner energetic vivacity; though one is generated by vigorously realizing one’s own will to power, while the other is bound up in holy love and its accompanying felicity. Both of them see modern altruistic love resulting in a debased life; though one is partial to a life of vitality in affirming his own being, the other finds a loftier stratum of emotion lying above that of life, serving as the center of human beings, and of overriding importance to bliss. It is conspicuous that Scheler assimilates some aspects of Nietzsche’s thought as the categories through which he reinterprets the Christian understanding of love. As a result, Scheler mounts a remarkably forcible apologetics in response to Nietzsche’s critique, and strikingly incorporates the dispositions of Nietzsche’s \textit{Übermensch} into Christian spirituality in a very constructive manner. By virtue of Scheler’s assimilation, the Christian teaching of \textit{agape} now represents dispositions like self-trust, abounding in passion and steering one’s course by reveling in divine love conducive to her self-affirmation rather than by merely reacting. These dispositions are by no means fundamentally at variance with those of Nietzsche’s \textit{Übermensch}. In this sense, some features of \textit{Übermensch} are grafted onto the meaning of Christian \textit{agape}, through which Christian spirituality is considerably enriched.

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 102.