

**VALUES AND BEING:
Critical Analysis of Manfred Frings' Idea
of Functional Existence of Values**

“Value” is one of the fundamental notions of Max Scheler’s (1874–1928) ethical doctrine, whose magnum opus *Formalism in Ethics and Material Ethics of Values* (1913/1916) is probably the most radical endeavor in the history of philosophy to ground ethics on the basis of inquiry into the nature of values and their hierarchical relations. Scheler’s “material ethics of values”, which rests upon the basic principles of phenomenological approach, aims to reconcile moral absolutism and emotivism, epistemological apriorism and the inquiry into the matter (i.e. content) of values, namely those philosophical approaches which traditionally are in mutual opposition. Principally, “value” (Wert) is a chief notion, on which all the approaches mentioned above converge, since value itself — in its ideal aprioristic features — constitutes the basis for moral obligation. For this reason, the nature of values is a prior subject of ethical scrutinizing. Yet, among all the questions pertaining to the nature of values, the question of their *ontological status* is logically primary and fundamental: since values constitute the necessary basis for moral oughtness (Sollen), the justification or refutation of their absolute character determines whether ethics can provide a firm foundation for our moral life, or will we be forced to abandon its normative intentions and limit ourselves to the mere description of actually existing morals.

Moreover, Scheler’s emotive value-ethics as a form of absolutistic ethics is definitely sensitive to any

attempts to determine the ontological nature of values, since the very legitimacy of its imperatives depends upon the conception of value-being. Particularly, it is not unexpected that ontological presuppositions of Scheler's idea of value have become a significant subject for several researches. Probably, one of the most influential approaches to Scheler's value-ontology is the conception of "functional existence" of values, proposed by Manfred Frings (1925–2008)¹. Frings' understanding of Scheler's value-ontology can be expressed by two theses: **a) values exist only in feelings, b) values exist only in functional relation with something**. However, this laconic view causes several problems as it conflicts with Scheler's doctrine, which it aims to *explicate*, as well as revealing certain substantial *inner* contradictions. Primarily, as long as Frings' conception leads to subjectivistic and relativistic interpretations (as will be demonstrated further), its careful analysis is necessary for clarifying and defending absolutistic intentions of Scheler's ethics. Thus, we **aim to perform a critical analysis of Frings' conception of functional existence of values, namely elucidating its inner contradictions and problematic conceptual results**. Hence, the ontological presuppositions of Scheler's doctrine will be considered only inasmuch as it is necessary for elaborating the difference between Scheler's and Frings' approaches. Frings' conception will be considered in the following way, whereby (I) will demonstrate that Scheler's axiology rests upon adequate differentiation between two axiological "regions", namely the ideal sphere of aprioristic value-contents and the real sphere of natural value-experience. In (II), we present two basic theses of Frings' conception of value-being, namely the thesis of purely representational existence and the thesis of functional existence of values. Following that, we will argue that Frings' reduction of value-being to mere representational givenness, which rests upon neglecting of the abovementioned distinction between the ideal and real realms, (III) leads to the relativistic interpretation of the ontological nature of essences, which challenges any possibility of rigorous phenomenological cognition. On a related note, (IV) this reduction induces to the subjectivistic understanding of the being of values, which makes it impossible to determine an autonomous moral criterion. Next, in (V), we suggest that the assumption of functional existence confronts the thesis of representational givenness of values since it presupposes specific pseudo-ideal realm of values, which "exists" before experiential representation. Finally, in (VI), it is proposed that this pseudo-ideal value-realm cannot give an autonomous moral criterion because it eliminates any difference between the factual and the normative.

¹ The idea of functional existence of values is presented in Frings' *The Mind of Max Scheler* [Frings 1997: 22–25] and in his *Introduction to Three Essays by Max Scheler* [Frings 1987: xxvi–xxvii]; apart from that, Frings' idea of functional existence is a subject of special consideration in Phillip Blosser's *Six questions concerning Scheler's ethic* [Blosser 1999: 212–214] and *Scheler's Theory of Values Reconsidered* [Blosser 1997b]; additionally, Frings' idea of functional existence of values is also mentioned in the fundamental *Encyclopedia of Phenomenology*, namely in *Ethics in Scheler* [Blosser 1997a: 192].

I. Two axiological regions: values as intentional “elements” of emotional experience versus ideal trans-empirical structures of value-realm

“Value” is not only the most fundamental notion of Scheler’s ethics but is also the most confusing and ambiguous one. Its description includes several ontologically “stressed” yet insufficiently clear formulas: for example, the author of *Formalism in Ethics* describes values as “real” (wirklich), “present” (bestehende), “existent” (bestehende), “absolute” (absolute), “autonomous” (selbstständige), “ultimate” (ursprüngliche), “objective” (objektive). On top of that, Scheler refers to values using such notions as “being” (Sein), “existence” (Existenz), “fact” (Tatsache), “object” (Gegenstand). Obviously, such a rich ontological “palette” can lead researchers into confusion, causing erroneous interpretations of value-being. Thus, the primary condition of adequate interpretation of Scheler’s ethics is a careful analysis of contexts in which all of those previously mentioned notions are used.

Therefore, any approach to Scheler’s ontology of values must necessarily pay tribute to inexplicit yet substantial demarcation of two regions of value-being, whereby the first region is constituted by values as elements of *natural* emotional experience (e.g. experiencing of the beauty of the starry sky), while the second one is represented by values *per se*, i.e., ideal structures and interconnections of value-realm, which are ontologically independent from the sphere of experience (e.g. apprehension of the essence of beauty *itself*). It is precisely due to this ontological demarcation that values gain partially different ontological descriptions. Accordingly, **values are “present” or “exist” in a world² as properties (Wertqualitäten) of some goods (Güter) in which they become “real”, e.g. the value of justice is *real* in a particular act of conduct or, similarly, the value of beauty is “real” in a particular poem. However, it should be emphasized that values *themselves do not exist and possess no “reality”, but constitute specific “ideal objects” transcending boundaries of “reality” and “existence”. In other words, they are “autonomous” (selbstständige) and “objective” (objective) essences, which stand in necessary connections to each other constituting an “absolute”, “invariable” order of ranks³.*** For example, the es-

² Here, “the world” is taken to mean not a self-existent reality in a naive materialistic sense but implies a “world of experience”. Thus, values do not appear as real *properties* of *real entities*, but constitute peculiar intentional elements of our experience of the world; at the same time, values as intentional entities can be cognized in their ideal and invariable features, i.e. a priori.

³ “It is only in goods that values become ‘real’ [wirklich]... In a good... a value is objective [objektiv] (as it always is) and real at the same time... Value-qualities, however, are ‘ideal objects’, as are qualities of colors and sounds” [Scheler 1916: 16; Scheler 1973a: 21]. “...there are authentic [echte] and true [wahre] value-qualities and... they constitute a special domain of objectivities, have their own distinct relations and correlations, and, as value-*qualities*, can be, for example, higher or lower. This being the case, there can be among these value-qualities an *order* and an *order of ranks* (Rangordnung), both of which are independent of the presence of a *realm of goods* in which they appear, entirely independent of the movements and changes of these goods

sential fact that the “existence” of a positive value is itself a positive value [Scheler, 1916: p. 21-22; Scheler, 1973: p. 26] belongs to the ideal sphere of values, which do not “exist”. Likewise, the superiority of the value of the sacred over the value of pleasure is given in the act of feeling (F hlen) as an *objective* hierarchical relation, which is *ontologically extraneous* to the act itself⁴. Between the experiential representation of values and the ideal value-sphere, there lays an ontological abyss, identical to the ontological chasm between real spatial forms and ideal laws of geometry. **Notably, the values per se constitute the criterion basis for moral evaluation and ought (Sollen), and in this regard their ontological nature is of prior ethical relevance.** At the same time, one should note that the underestimating of the fundamental ontological demarcation inescapably leads to erroneous interpretation of Scheler’s ethics.

II. Two theses of Frings’ conception of value-being

Frings’ interpretation of value-being is a vivid example of what difficulties lay in the way of conception which disregards the fundamental ontological difference between the ideal and real axiological regions. In his turn, Frings acknowledges the independence of values from things but interprets it merely as a *separate given ness within a particular subjective act*: for instance, the value of the sacred remains self-identical in the perception of the idol, saint or God, just like green belongs to different objects but still remains *the same* color green [Frings, 1997: p. 24]. Thus, values (much like colors) exist in a specific “function” with something and possess an autonomous character *within an act*. However, the very “functional relationship” just mentioned is the only condition of their emergence within the separate act. Frings compares values to colors, which need some substrate in order for them to be, and, similarly, draws parallels with light, which exists only in contact with a particular surface. In this way, he emphasizes that “values must enter into a function with something in order for them to be. By themselves, they are not objective entities” [Frings, 1997: p. 24]. In a related thesis, he, likewise, states: “Without ‘seeing’ there are no colors. Without ‘feeling’ there are no values” [ibid., p. 25]. Both statements are closely intertwined: according to Frings’ interpretation, **values “exist” solely in a function with an object,**

in history, and ‘*a priory*’ to the experience of this realm of goods” [Scheler 1916: 10; Scheler 1973a: 15].

⁴ For instance, the relation between the act of preferring (Vorzugsakt) and its object, i.e. value, is regarded by Scheler as a relation between the subjective act and an invariable fact. Therefore, preferring is an act in which a person *discovers*, rather than *designs* or *determines*, values in their invariable order: “...one may not say that the ‘being-higher’ of a value only ‘means’ that it is the value ‘preferred’. For if the height of a value is given ‘in’ preferring, this height is nevertheless a relation in the *essence* of the values concerned. Therefore, the ‘*ordered ranks of values*’ are themselves absolutely *invariable*, whereas the ‘rules of preferring’ are, in principle, variable throughout history (a variation which is very different from the apprehension of new values)” [Scheler 1916: 85-86; Scheler 1973a: 88].

but the functional relationship itself is presented only in a subjective act, beyond which there exist no values as “objective entities”. In other words, it is important for Frings to emphasize that values do not constitute some ideal realm similar to Platonic ideas [Frings, 1987: p, xxvii]. Thus, Frings’ approach reduces value-being to a mere empirical existence, i.e. existence as an object of a subjective act. Although both these are strongly interconnected within his approach, they are still partially incompatible if not mutually *exclusive*. Given all of this, we designate both theses as (a) “thesis of value-being as a representational givenness” and (b) “thesis of functional existence of values”. Having ascertained that, we now proceed to a thorough consideration of both theses aimed at clarifying that a denial of the ideal axiological dimension inescapably leads to insurmountable inner contradictions.

III. Thesis of value-being as a representational givenness and disproof of the idea of phenomenological cognition

Frings’ reduction of ontological status of values to the correlative components of feelings denies the fundamental phenomenological differentiation between the ideal essence and an empirical fact. **As long as values in phenomenological axiology are regarded as essences⁵, deontologizing of values makes problematic the ontological status of essences themselves thereby challenging the legitimacy of phenomenology as a rigorous *eidetic* science.** Specifically, Frings rightly insists on the fundamental act-object correlation⁶ yet sets aside the ontological status of the *correlation itself*. Although the intentional structure as a specific *eidetic* “fact” cannot be given to us otherwise than in some *intentionally organized* act, it would still be incorrect to suppose that an *intentional relation itself* “exists” solely as given to some cognizing subject or when brought into a mysterious “function” with an accompanying act: making an ideal fact (intentional structure of an act) dependent on an empirical condition (i.e. givenness to a subject) ruins the very essence of the ideal by reducing it to contingent and variable. Meanwhile, the very essence of an eidetic evidence implies that an ideal fact can be grasped as an *absolute and necessary state of affairs* that has no relation to any empirical condition (e.g. its givenness in an

⁵ The idea that values constitute a specific type of essences was expressed by Nicolai Hartmann, who developed the basic intentions of Scheler’s axiology. In his *Ethics*, we find a brief, but substantive, description of value-being: “values are essences, and essences are cognized (einsehen) only a priori” [Hartmann 1962: 530]. Chapter 14 of Hartmann’s *Ethics* is accordingly titled “Values as essences”.

⁶ Scheler acknowledges the idea of the intentional structure of an act as an “ultimate principle of phenomenology” [Scheler 1916: 272; Scheler 1973a: 265]. Feelings (Fühlen), have intentional structure, i.e. they possess an “original relatedness” (ursprüngliches Sichbeziehen) and “directedness” (Sichrichten) toward its object, which is a value [Scheler 1916: 264; Scheler 1973a: 257]. Moreover, intentional feelings, unlike non-intentional feeling-states, possess a cognitive function [ibid.]: as was already mentioned, subjective acts of value-grasping reveal values in their *intrinsic* features; thus, value-acts *transcend* the boundaries of our subjective being.

act): **the act of essential cognition is a contingent personal act that reveals a necessary trans-personal fact.** Likewise, the same relation of real and ideal determines the sphere of values and value-giving emotional acts. For example, moral values stand in a *necessary essential relation* to a person in such a way that only a person can be a “bearer” (Träger) of justice/wisdom/generosity (by contrast with aesthetical values that can “belong” only to things); however, this relation *itself* is grasped as a trans-personal objective fact which by no means can be ontologically reduced to mere givenness within a particular intentional act. Still, Frings’ conception deprives the value-realm of its ontological autonomy by reducing its being to mere representation within the sphere of personal acts: **instead of regarding value-essences as ontologically transcendent but at the same time cognitively immanent, Frings construes cognitive immanence as a fundamental ontological border and in doing so unreasonably “constricts” the very essence of the ideal.**

IV. Thesis of value-being as a representational givenness and disproof of the idea of ethical absolutism

Identification of the mode of value-representation with an ontological nature of values *themselves* not only leads to controversial epistemological interpretations but also makes problematic the task of moral justification; consequently, ethics loses a ground for its absolutistic claims. Notably, as long as values are not only necessary objects of our emotional experience but also constitute a basis of moral prescriptions, any ontological reinterpretations of values inescapably affect their normative status. That is why **Frings’ denial of the status of values as *entities-in-themselves* as well as the reduction of their peculiar ontological nature to the representational givenness nullifies the very condition of strict moral oughtness (Sollen), e.g. the *ontological autonomy* of values themselves.** In other words, if “values do not exist beyond feelings”, then the moral criterion must be valid only in case if value is apprehended *hic et nunc*: for example, a value-perverse conduct would be morally evil only when the actor himself/herself or anybody else for that matter *actually* perceives it as a perverse kind of conduct. Although the *moral evaluation* necessarily implies actual apprehension of value, *the very moral nature* of a conduct cannot depend on whether it is apprehended by an actor or an observer — unless we do not intend to “modify” Protagorean subjectivism. It is possible to elaborate a rigorous criterion solely on the basis of something that is transcendent to a subject. Such a transcendence, however, must be interpreted ontologically rather than cognitively, *viz.* value as a variable element of emotional experience can be regarded as a first stage in grasping objective essential value-contents and invariable hierarchic relations; although the latter reveal themselves in a subjective perceptual field, their content is grasped with an apodictic evidence as absolute and necessary. Principally, in phenomenological ethics, this absolute and necessary content is the only basis for absolute and necessary norms and imperatives. For this reason, the denial of ontological autonomy of

values makes any aspirations for ethical strictness irrelevant: the ontological immanentisation of values, which was performed by Frings, results in relativisation of the criterion for moral conduct.

V. Thesis of functional existence of values and a presupposition of pre-experiential value-being

In spite of an *explicit* assertion that values do not exist beyond feelings, Frings' conception rests on *implicit* presuppositions which imply that value-being is not reduced to the representational givenness. According to this conception, "values must enter into a function with something in order for them to be" [Frings, 1997: p. 24]. As we have previously demonstrated, Frings' conception fails to capture an authentic meaning of value-autonomy reducing values to mere representations: it acknowledges a mutual independence of values and things, but this independence means nothing more than an identity of value (sacred) within perceptions of different things (God, saint, fetish) [ibid.]. Meanwhile, the thesis of functional existence stands in opposition to the thesis of representational givenness since it relies on the *presupposition* of pre-experiential being of values; these pre-experiential values surely must "exist" in some manner in order to come into "function" with something. Thus, **the idea of functional existence implies that values exist not only in an act of representation but also before they come into subjective experience.** Yet, the peculiar ontological nature of pre-experiential values does not become a subject of Frings' conception, which goes no further than to state that values are similar to light and colors which need to come into "function" with a surface in order for them to appear [Frings, 1997: p. 24-25]. Meanwhile, the idea of functional existence not only confronts the idea of *purely* representational value-being but also reveals a substantial inner discord.

VI. Thesis of functional existence of values and the impossibility of autonomous moral criterion

The thesis of functional existence has several conceptual gaps: it remains unclear what are the particular "rules" according to which values must enter into a function with something as well as the specific modes of such functional relationship. However, the main consequence of this thesis is that pre-experiential and experiential values turn out to be "stages" of *the same ontological "chain"*. Specifically, the idea that there is some *direct ontological transition* between pre-experiential and experiential values is corroborated by Frings' analogy with light and color, which considers an interconnection between phenomena of *the same ontological order* (i.e. light and surface upon which it extends are both physical objects that come into direct interplay). It may, therefore, be concluded that pre-experiential values must somehow overcome their ontological boundaries and "come" into the world where they enter "into a function" with "real" objects. Accordingly, non-existing (experientially) and existing values appear to be contentially *the same values*, which, however, belong to different ontological "stages". In

practice, it means that a deed is just whereby the value of justice itself somehow *transcends its previous state of non-existence* entering into a function with it. Still, such a “procedural” unification of different levels of value-being coupled with a presumption of *contential identity* of pre-experiential and experiential values can lead only to the denunciation of the autonomy and objectivity of the criterion for adequacy of *actually existing* value-contents and value-orders: the criterion for some real entity cannot be ontologically connected with the realm of the real, just as the criterion for logical accuracy of real judgment cannot be found in any *real* judgment but only in some ideal realm, namely laws of logic, which have no ontological connection with the realm of the real⁷. Meanwhile, **Frings’ interpretation ruins the very possibility of contrast between the factual and the normative since it eliminates the only condition of such demarcation, namely the structural nonidentity of empirical value-contents and ideal value-structures.** Similarly, if we regard non-existing values as ideal essences yet *adhere to the thesis that non-existing and existing values are contentially identical*, then we arrive at an absurd conclusion that *real* value-experience *necessarily* represents *ideal* value-contents, while, the latter confronts our observation of the ultimate diversity and discrepancy of factually existing value-experiences. Hence, the only way to avoid the abovementioned contradictions is to abandon the thesis of functional existence and to postulate a strict distinction between the ideal and real axiological regions. In this case, values do not possess *procedural primacy*, i.e. they do not come into the world as if they cross the threshold of a house; instead, ideal values are *ontologically and ethically prior* in the sense that they constitute an autonomous criterion for real deeds and evaluations, just like the ideal laws of logic “exist” and “matter” regardless of their realization within subjective experiences.

Conclusion

Based on prior reasoning, it may be ascertained that Frings’ conception of value-being is a radical antipode of Scheler’s absolutist ethics. However, both theses of Frings’ conception, namely the thesis (a) that values are mere representations and (b) that values “exist” functionally, not only erroneously represent Scheler’s ethical program but also turn out to be *intrinsically inconsistent. (I-II)* Both theses arose from the disregard of the basic distinction between the sphere of empirical value-being, in which values exist as representations of subjective acts, as well as the realm of ideal value-structures and aprioristic relations,

⁷ Surely, the analogy with logical principles has its limits: ethical and logical concepts appear to be of different qualitative nature, which means that they resist any mutual reduction. Still, both possess *aprioristic* character resting upon the analysis of *essences*. Thereby, it is not unexpected that Scheler himself refers to such analogies. In *Ordo Amoris*, he, for instance, states: “The heart possesses a strict analogue of logic in its *own* domain that it does not borrow from the logic of the understanding [Verstand]...” [Scheler 1957: 362; Scheler 1973b: 117]; “...there is *ordre du coeur*, *logique du coeur*, *mathématique du coeur*, as rigorous, as objective, as absolute, and as inviolable as the propositions and inferences of deductive logic” [ibid.].

which have their *specific mode of being* as *autonomous trans-personal entities* (though they reveal their objectiveness only in a subjective act). **(III-IV)** Due to a misinterpretation of the ideal value-realm, Frings reduces value-being to mere givenness in an individual act: as he insists that values exist only in intentional feelings, he absolutely ignores the ontological status of *the very intentional relation*, hierarchy of values, and moral oughtness, which have sense only in terms of possessing an *ideal trans-personal being*. Besides, the reduction of values to mere givenness challenges the idea of phenomenological cognition as geared towards the *invariable* structures of the world and experience, thusly, making impossible any attempt to determine the *autonomous* criterion for moral oughtness. **(V)** The second thesis of Frings' conception, viz. that values exist purely in functional relation with something, is based on misconstruing of the ideal value-realm as well. It confronts the previous statement that values are mere representations since it *implies* that values must already *somehow* exist *before* they enter into function with something existing beyond subjective acts. **(VI)** Still, such *pseudo*-ideality has nothing in common with an authentic value-autonomy since it implies material (i.e. contential) identity of pre-experiential and experiential values, which makes impossible any distinction between *actual* and *normative* states of affairs, hence, depreciating the very idea of an autonomous criterion for moral conduct, which can be construed only on the basis of material (i.e. contential) non-identity of normative and actual states of affairs.

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VALUES AND BEING: CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF MANFRED FRINGS' IDEA OF FUNCTIONAL EXISTENCE OF VALUES

The article contains a critical analysis of Manfred Frings' interpretation of Max Scheler's conception of value-being. The core task of the article is to reveal ontological implications of Frings' interpretation, explicate its inner contradictions and problematical conceptual results. It is shown that Frings' interpretation rests upon the disregard of the distinction between the ideal and real axiological realms, which is essential for Scheler; Frings' omitting of the ideal value-realm with its aprioristic laws and relations determines two main theses of his interpretation, i.e. the thesis of the value-being as mere experiential givenness as well as the thesis of functional existence of values. It is further demonstrated that both theses inescapably lead to contradictions. Specifically, the reduction of the value-being to mere experiential givenness makes impossible any attempt to determine the autonomous criterion for moral oughtness and, thereby ruining the idea of ethical absolutism, which defines the core aspiration for Scheler's value-ethics. Similarly, the ontological immanentisation of values seriously challenges the ontological status of essences and, thus, makes impossible the idea of phenomenology as a rigorous eidetic science. Frings' other thesis, i.e. the thesis of functional existence of values, implies the pre-experiential being of values, and, henceforth, comes into conflict with the thesis of purely representational being of values. Still, the assumption of functional existence leads to the material, viz. contential, identifying of pre-experiential and experiential values, ultimately questioning the possibility of contrast between actual and normative state of affairs and, therefore, demolishes the very idea of an autonomous criterion for moral conduct.

Keywords: Max Scheler; Manfred Frings; ontology; ethics; axiology; phenomenology; values; essences

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