Borderline cases of phenomenology

IV Reflections on Ethics in the Freiburg Years

Appendix XXXII

<Absolute obligation and absolute love>[[1]](#footnote-0)

<On> Scheler’s preferring without any comparison:

“Some content is grasped as the best possible in this preferring, and a value-answer is directed at it as the best. I can love someone with the evidence that I could never love anyone else in the same way – or be enthusiastic about something beautiful [344] with the evidence that nothing more beautiful could exist, making me more enthusiastic.”[[2]](#footnote-1)

This “preferring without any comparison” anyway is explained by comparison here. But what is indicated here is a certain evident (or supposed) absoluteness, having its analogue in the absolute obligation. A mother for example saving her child is absolutely certain without any categorical imperative that she should do this and nothing else. And likewise might someone else be certain that he loves someone in a unique way, with some absoluteness being implied within love prior to all comparison. It might be said here: love is not a momentary act, but a lastingly-deciding-oneself-for-a-person. I can decide for several persons in this way, and thus I can love many persons at the same time (related to my life horizon, not excluding later abandonment). But there is the “unique love” in contrast to these loves, searching and wishing for a similar requited love – a complete becoming one with the loved one or knowing-oneself-to-be-one, a “having taken him completely into the proper Ego, and having completely combined his Ego with the other one”, (a love), excluding every comparison for the sake of this completeness. I have entirely “devoted” myself, and I can do this only to one [person]. Of course there is a problem. You can get lost completely, and you can devote yourself quite freely; and it may be asked, whether this is allowed, whether it is something right, the right love, whether it is rather allowed to only devote yourself completely to God in such love, and then devote yourself forever, etc.

Likewise the question, whether there is an absolute practical obligation without any comparison, etc.

1. Possibly about 1920.- Editor’s note. [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
2. Dietrich von Hildebrand, *Die Idee der sittlichen Handlung*, Jahrbuch für Philosophie und phänomenologische Forschung, Band III (1916), page 228, note. – Editor’s note. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)