

HANS BERNHARD SCHMID¹

COLLECTIVE EMOTIONS
PHENOMENOLOGY, ONTOLOGY, AND IDEOLOGY
WHAT SHOULD WE LEARN FROM
MAX SCHELER'S WAR PROPAGANDA?²

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IN his History of the Emotions Annual Lecture 2013 at Queen Mary, University of London, Steven Connor of the University of Cambridge listed some “Reasons to be Doubtful” about the idea of collective Emotions.³ Connor does not take issue with the notion that collections or masses of people can be emotionally moved, and that emotion plays an important role in the formation and maintenance of groups. Rather, the target of his critique is the view that there are emotions that are, in a literal sense, a collective’s. Collectives cannot really have emotions, he argues, only individuals can. Whatever collective emotions there seem to be are really either aggregates of individual emotions – such as in the cases analyzed by early mass psychology –, or some form of fictional ascriptions of emotions to collectives. Though he does not put his allegation in quite these terms, Connor further suggests that the reason for the fiction of collective emotions is basically ideological in nature: the aim is to subject people to supra-individual homogenous entities. And this is basically a political agenda. Ascriptions of collective emotions are thus aimed at suppressing the true plurality of our social lives, and they are, as Connor puts it at the end of his text, expressive of “a literally totalitarian form of counting-for-one”.⁴

The general view behind this critique is hardly new. In some regards,

¹ University of Vienna (hans.bernhard.schmid@univie.ac.at)

² I am grateful to Matthias Schlossberger and Ingrid Vendrell Ferran for useful hints.

³ S. CONNOR, *Collective Emotions. Reasons to be Doubtful*, The History of Emotions annual lecture given at Queen Mary, University of London, 9th October 2013. <<http://stevenconnor.com/collective.html>>.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 17.

Connor's views echo Aristotle's objection against the affective base of Plato's "totalitarian" construction of the unity of the republic – the collective "like-feeling"⁵ to be instilled in the guardians by abolishing private property.⁶ Other predecessors of this can be found in the analysis of mass emotions in early social science, where it was analyzed how affective attitudes can spread among the mass of individuals that are dislodged from earlier social structures by industrialization, and how the atomized members of mass society then project their hopes and fears onto a leading figure, thereby constructing a problematic form of "mass unity". Even Emile Durkheim – who stands out among the early social scientists in taking the idea of a genuinely collective emotion most literally – can be reconstructed in a way that conforms to methodological individualism.⁷ In the context of the recent debate on collective emotions,⁸ Connor is not alone in rejecting the view that collectives can have proper emotions either. Rather, Connor's skeptical view really seems to be mainstream. Very few authors advocate a version of the claim attacked by Connor.

The way in which Connor's contribution stands out in the current debate, however, is that he extends his critique of the concept of genuinely collective emotions to the political agenda which he suspects to lie behind the idea. This line of critique, I believe, identifies a blind spot. Connor does not use that term, but I think it is safe to say that the issue is the problem of ideology; claims about what there is in the social world are tightly connected to views how social life should be. Indeed, ontological claims are often a cover-up for normative views, and this is the objection of ideological thinking that Connor addresses to those who think that collectives can be the subject of affective attitudes. As I have argued for a rather straightforward ontological conception of collective emotions myself, I would like to take up Connor's important challenge in this paper.

I will proceed in three steps. First, I will address Connor's non-nor-

⁵ *Resp.* 409b.

⁶ *Pol.* 1261b.

⁷ R. KÖNIG, *Émile Durkheim zur Diskussion. Jenseits von Dogmatismus und Skepsis*, München-Wien, 1978.

⁸ See e.g. C. VON SCHEVE, M. SALMELA (edd.), *Collective Emotions*, Oxford 2014.

mative reasons for rejecting the idea of collective emotions, and briefly state why I think Connor is mistaken in his factual claims (1). I will then turn to the normative question, and argue for a way in which Connor's challenge persists even if we reject the mistaken individualistic ontology of emotions to which he subscribes. As this paper is based on a talk given at the annual conference of the Max Scheler Association, I will refer to Scheler's work wherever this is possible. Scheler is widely recognized as a classic in the analysis of what it means for people to share an emotion. I argue that a sound understanding of the way in which emotions can be genuinely collective should build on Scheler's notion of shared feelings, or "immediate co-feeling" or "feeling-together" (*unmittelbares Miteinanderfühlen*). Yet a closer look at the context of this idea in Scheler's work will quickly lead us into murky waters: Scheler's concept of co-feeling is indeed part and parcel of a German nationalist agenda, and indeed the core conceptual tool for his propaganda (2). In the last section, I will advocate the view that our basic social notions always come with more or less comprehensive political views, and I will briefly sketch a possible view of what this may mean for the idea of social ontology (3).

1) *Phenomenological Ontology*

As far as I can see, Connor presents two main arguments for rejecting the view that there can be genuine collective emotions: the first has to do with the role of consciousness (a), the second with the role of the body in emotion (b).

a) Along with many authors in the current debate, Connor seems to be open to the idea that groups may have some sort of a mind (and thus can be some sort of agents), but he firmly denies that collectives can have consciousness. In his text, he repeatedly refers to groups as "zombies", thus using the concept that is often invoked in the current philosophical literature for an agent who has perceptions and goals, but for whom there isn't anything *it is like to be* that agent. Whatever group mind there may be, the claim goes, it certainly does not involve any phenomenal aspects. Against Margaret Gilbert and Bryce Huebner, who seem to think that the lack of collective consciousness does not undermine the possibility of collective emotions, Connor claims that an

agent who does not have the capacity of *feeling* cannot be an agent who has emotions. As there is simply nothing it is like for a collective to be a collective, a collective cannot have emotions.

The argument against Gilbert and Huebner seems to be right as far as it goes. Yet there is a further point to consider. It is not only true that emotions involve consciousness. *Mind* involves consciousness, too. A mind is always somebody's mind, and as argued elsewhere,⁹ it is that subject's mind in virtue of that subject's pre-reflexive self-awareness, or non-observational self-knowledge, of some of his or her mental attitudes or processes as his or hers. Together with ownership, self-awareness constitutes the form of unity of the mind, and self-awareness is the feature in virtue of which a subject's attitudes are that subject's commitments in such a way that any subject is under a normative pressure towards rational coherence, and thus has a first-personal perspective. A subject without pre-reflexive self-awareness, or groundless self-knowledge, lacks the feature in virtue of which whatever mental attitudes there may be are his or hers, and it cannot see those attitudes as her commitments, and thus lacks the capacity for reasoning.¹⁰ This is to say that a subject without self-awareness cannot *have* mental attitudes. Pre-reflexive self-awareness, or groundless self-knowledge, however, is a feature of *consciousness*; it is consciousness in virtue of which we are aware of our attitudes *as ours*. Thus if collectives are ascribed a mind in the sense that there are intentional attitudes that are a collective's, perhaps together with other attitudes, to which the collective is committed in such a way as being under a rational pressure towards coherence, there needs to be a way for that collective to be aware of those attitudes as the collective's own, and I submit that whatever form that awareness takes in a collective thereby simply *is* that collective's consciousness.

Those numerous current authors who, like Connor, easily talk of a collective mind and, at the same time, deny collective consciousness,

⁹ H.B. SCHMID, *Plural Self-Awareness*, «Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences», 13 (2014), 7-24.

¹⁰ H.B. SCHMID, *On Knowing What We're Doing Together. Groundless Group Self-Knowledge and Plural Self-Blindness*, in M. FRICKER, M. BRADY (edd.), *The Epistemic Life of Groups*, Oxford (forthcoming), 51-72.

have a surprisingly underdeveloped notion of what makes a mind a mind, and indeed, it can be shown that the smartest among these philosophers are aware of the problem, and just one step away from the solution.¹¹ I suspect that the reason why collective consciousness seems to be so hard to accept is the tacit assumption that if collectives have consciousness, there must be something it is like for the collective to be the collective *that is not what it is like for the members of the group to be the members of the group*. I see no reason at all to accept this conclusion. The consciousness of the group is the group members' plural pre-reflective self-awareness of their collective attitudes *as theirs*, collectively. Yet there is nothing it is like for the group to be the group other than its members' plural pre-reflective self-awareness. However, it is a misconstrual of plural pre-reflective self-awareness to understand it as a distribution of individual self-awareness of each member. Plural self-awareness is not something each individual has for him- or herself. It is something they have *together*, collectively, rather than distributively. Genuine collective emotions are those emotions of which the members of a collective are plurally self-aware as theirs, collectively.

b) Yet one might doubt if this conception of collective consciousness as plural self-awareness gives us the sort of “feel” required in emotions. Connor mentions that the sort of consciousness involved in emotions are bodily feelings. An example he highlights is shame, which involves the bodily experience of a blushing face, and similar points can easily be made with regard to other emotions. Connor argues that since collectives do not have a body, and thus do not have a face that can blush, or that can be experienced as blushing, collectives cannot have shame, or other emotions – those emotions would have to be “lodged in a group body” that does not seem to exist.

One way to counter this objection¹² can build on Max Scheler's insights. Among the many merits of Max Scheler's work is a careful analysis of the different ways in which feelings are body-related.¹³ Some

¹¹ C. LIST, P. PETTIT, *Group Agency*, Oxford 2011, chap. 9.

¹² H.B. SCHMID, *Shared Feelings. Towards a Phenomenology of Collective Affective Intentionality*, in H.B. SCHMID, *Plural Action*, Dordrecht 2009, 59-85.

¹³ M. SCHELER [1912-1916], *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Values: A New Attempt toward the Foundation of an Ethical Personalism*, Evanston 1973.

feelings are located in the body like the tickle in one's finger. Other feelings, such as one's shame or anger in one's forehead, or the feeling of guilt in one's breast, clearly involve the body in the way of bodily sensations, too. But there is an important difference: it is not in the way in which the tickle is felt in one's finger that the shame is felt in one's forehead. The feeling is not a localized experience, it is a feeling which one feels, to use Descartes' expression, "as if they were in the soul". You may blush with shame, but if you experience the blushing of your face in the way you experience the tickling in your finger, you're not, in that moment, experiencing the shame. Emotional feelings involve the body in an *adverbial way* – they are bodily experiences, not experiences of the body. Thus if we experience an emotion as ours, collectively, we may do so bodily without assuming some collective body of which there is an experience.¹⁴

The phenomenological alternative to Gilbert's and Bryce Huebner's subject-account of collective emotions argues that collective emotions do involve feelings, and thus consciousness and bodily experiences. A collective's feelings are those feelings that are shared among the members in the way of the members' plural pre-reflective self-awareness of their emotional concerns as theirs, collectively.¹⁵ This conception of collective emotions in terms of shared feelings owes more to Max Scheler than just the conception of feelings of the soul. In chapter 2 of his *Nature of Sympathy*, Scheler gives a short but impressively concise account of what it means for individuals to literally share a feeling. Here is this famous and much-discussed passage:

Two parents stand beside the dead body of a beloved child. They feel in common the "same" sorrow, the "same" anguish. It is not that A feels this sorrow and B feels it also, and moreover that they both know they are feeling it. No, it is a *feeling-in-common*. A's sorrow is in no way an "external" matter for B here, as it is, e.g. for their friend C, who joins them, and commiserates "with them" or "upon their sorrow". On the contrary, they feel it together, in the sense that they feel and experience in com-

¹⁴ H.B. SCHMID, *Collective Emotions*, in K. LUDWIG, M. JANKOVIC (edd.), *The Routledge Handbook of Collective Intentionality*, London (forthcoming).

¹⁵ H.B. SCHMID, *The Feeling of Being a Group*, in C. VON SCHEVE, M. SALMELA (edd.), *Collective Emotions*, Oxford 2014, 4-16.

mon, not only the self-same value-situation, but also the same emotional impulse in regard to it. The sorrow, as value-content, and the grief, as characterizing the functional relation thereto, are here *one and identical*.¹⁶

Much of this short passage and the remarks that follow it are somewhat open to interpretation and debated in the recent literature, but two basic tenets of Scheler's concept of "immediate co-feeling" (*unmittelbares Miteinanderfühlen*) seem to be quite clear.

i. Scheler famously distinguishes co-feeling from emotional contagion, emotional identification, and genuine sympathy. In the context of research on collective emotions, it is particularly striking that Scheler thus invokes a sense in which an emotion can be genuinely shared that does not appeal to the mechanisms of collective emotions that are highlighted in earlier mass psychology, where collective emotions have been seen as a matter of emotional mass contagion that is then projected by means of emotional identification on the figure of a single leader. With his conception of immediate co-feeling, Scheler conceives of a sense in which a collective – in this case, two parents – can be said to have an emotion that is set apart from contagion and identification. The view is that emotion can be collective by means of its being *shared* in a strong straightforward sense between the participants.

ii. Scheler claims that co-feeling is *irreducible* to a combination of individual feeling plus mutual knowledge, empathy, or some other form of social cognition or emotional identification. Sharing an emotion, Scheler suggests, is not some combination of individual emotion and a complex of reciprocal attitudes in the way Gerda Walther later suggested in her analysis of we-experience. Rather, where people share an emotion there is one emotion – a token, not a type – in which two or more members participate. Whether you think an emotion is a perception, a choice, a judgment, a state of mind, a process, a narrative structure, or any combination of these: the important Schelerian insight about co-feeling is that there is a sense in which it is what it is only in virtue of its being *one* emotional experience (perception, choice, judgment, state of mind, episode) with many participants.

To sum up: neither the claim that collectives cannot have emotions

¹⁶ M. SCHELER [1913], *The Nature of Sympathy*, Brunswick N.J. 2009, 12.

because they do not have consciousness, nor the claim that collectives cannot have emotions because they do not have a body are as obviously true as Connor makes it appear. Indeed, there is ample reason to come to a contrary conclusion. In both cases, this involves a distinction – in the case of consciousness, between the qualitative and the subjective aspect of consciousness, in the case of bodily feelings, the distinction between localized feelings and bodily feelings that are intentional. In his *Nature of Sympathy*, Max Scheler has made a case for a form in which a collective can have an emotion, where several individuals share the same token emotional state or attitude. In an earlier work, I have given an account of the token-identity of shared emotions in terms of plural pre-reflective self-awareness of the participants.¹⁷

2) Ideology

If Connor's claims concerning the alleged impossibility of collective emotions are unconvincing, does this mean that Connor's normative challenge, the accusation of ideology against the practice collective emotion ascription, is unfounded? It seems obvious that the answer has to be in the negative even if one happens to have strong views concerning the separation of description and evaluation. It seems clear that the fact that a concept has content cannot mean that its application has nothing to do with politics. In this regard, browsing Scheler's voluminous work for further references to the conception of immediate co-feeling is quite instructive. There is much to be found on co-feeling and co-experience, but in order to see what's there, the reader has to enter a somber wing of this huge intellectual edifice – a part which has not been ignored by general Scheler scholarship, but has been utterly neglected by those who, have appealed to Scheler's notion of immediate co-feeling in the recent debate on collective emotion and shared affective intentionality.¹⁸

The context is Scheler's writings on the First World War, and the case in point is his analysis of collective war enthusiasm and the kind of national affective unification that it brings about. What Scheler says

¹⁷ H.B. SCHMID, *Shared Feelings. Towards a Phenomenology of Collective Affective Intentionality*, in H.B. SCHMID, *Plural Action*, Dordrecht 2009, 59-85.

¹⁸ Myself included; cf. *ibid.*

in the writings on the topic, which he wrote and published in the first phase of the war, fully confirms Connor's suspicion. It is not so much a cool analysis of the structure of collective enthusiasm, but rather a symptom of a political ideology, a somewhat belated expression of what later came to be called the August Madness. Indeed, these writings are really just that: pieces of German nationalist war-propaganda. This has not escaped the notice of Scheler scholarship,¹⁹ but it is ignored in the current debate on shared emotion that in these writings, the much-discussed concept of immediate co-feeling and co-experience turns out to be the central conceptual pillar on which this entire propaganda relies.

To convey a sense of the tone of these writings and to show how central the concept of co-feeling is for this, I am quoting a longish passage from the text by the title *Der Krieg als Gesamterlebnis* – “The War as Total Experience”, a text which Scheler dates to the second half of 1915.²⁰

In this passage, Scheler conjures up an altogether and previously un-felt new «atmosphere of experience», a new «spiritual air», and he postulates a new form of national emotional we-experience. Scheler argues that there is a «total experience, co-experience through which the One that is called Germany *per se*, that is neither just nation nor state nor empire, that is all of these but at the same time more than all of them». And he continues, looking back enthusiastically at what he sees as the immediate co-feeling at the outset of the war:

There *is* a total experience, a co-experience! For we have actually experienced it as a new *form* of experience that had grown unknown to us. And this is far more than a particular new content of our lives; it is a new spiritual air and atmosphere, into which all contents are now immersed. Away, therefore, with the arbitrary constructions of a mistaken analysis that claims that a total experience is just a very complicated composition of experiences of individual people, complemented with mutual knowledge or belief that “the other”, too, has similar experiences. No! It has become as plain as the sun to us that this *togetherness* of experiencing, creating, suffering itself is a particular ultimate form of all

¹⁹ Cf., among many others, E.W. RANLY, *Max Scheler's Phenomenology of Community*, The Hague 1966, 6ff and M.D. BARBER, *Guardian of Dialogue – Max Scheler's Phenomenology, Sociology of Knowledge, and Philosophy of Love*, Lewisburg 1993.

²⁰ M. SCHELER, *Der Krieg als Gesamterlebnis*, GW IV, 271-282.

experiencing, that positive and new contents arise in this form of a truly “communal” form of thinking, believing, and willing [...].²¹

The move from a parent couple to a nation is certainly a big one, but the concept is recognizably the same. Scheler here clearly elaborates on the anti-reductionist move he makes in his depiction of the parent-case, where he argues that it is a mistake to construe the shared attitude as a complex of individual attitudes plus some structure of mutual belief (a description that is strikingly similar to the way John Searle dismisses reductionism about we-intention in his *Construction of Social Reality* [Searle 1995, 27]).²² “Total experience” is when there is one token experience that is of the form that has a plurality of subjects – subjects that are unified in sharing the one token experience. At the same time, it is hard not to be chilled by the prominence this concept gains in the context of Scheler’s war propaganda. Scheler goes as far as to portray this sort of collective emotion as a way of getting a joint act together as a larger-than-life national unity that transcends all borders of time and space:

It is *together* that hopes and futures are hoped for, together the same dangers are feared, *together* is one and the same sorrow being suffered; together we have a rock-hard belief in victory. And plain as the sun it has become that whoever co-experiences the total experience of Germany sees and knows at each moment: what’s contained in each co-experience is tremendously greater, more colorful, richer than the little bit or piece that his coincidental place inside or outside of the country – indeed everywhere where there’s German life, be it in America, Japan, India – allows him to co-experience; that each one knows and sees that this whole has a sense and a meaning far beyond the sum of all life-spans of contemporary Germans, indeed beyond the life-spans of all of our children and grand-children that we now forebode. Each one knows this, sees this – I say – immediately, that the total experience of Germany is greater and richer, and because everyone sees it and knows it (whether he praises or condemns it), the content of this total experience of Germany must be greater than the sum of all individual experiences – not just equally great or smaller, as this mistaken peace-construction logically necessitates to assume. By re-discovering this form of a truly communal

²¹ *Ebd.*, 271f.

²² J. SEARLE, *The Construction of Social Reality*, New York 1995.

spirit like a forgotten star, and by seeing in it “Germany” as if by our eyes, we found something that is equally independent of the coincidental occasion of discovery, this war from 1914-x, that is independent of place and time of discovery, of the consequence and origin of the war, of victory or defeat as the star is independent of the telescope through which it was first observed. Not only do we now look differently at ourselves as a nation and at the present age; our surrounding world, the terrestrial globe, historical past and future of humanity, too, have taken on a different structuring and relief in this new form of experiencing.²³

To read this as the piece of war propaganda is obviously is means to read it as pushing an agenda. Scheler is clearly aimed at the goal of protecting some of the “spirit” of the initial August Madness against the increasingly harsh realities of a prolonged war. This is about insulating a nationalist political agenda against the facts in the way typical of ideology.

The concept of immediate co-feeling obviously plays the central role here. The “new atmosphere” of “co-experiencing” of the alleged collective spirit is co-feeling and co-experiencing. The clearest indication in this direction, besides the general emphasis on shared emotions, is in the way in which Scheler rejects a reductionist account of the attitude in question. In a rather apodictic manner that suggests that more is at stake here than simply rejecting a mistaken form of analysis, Scheler does away with the view that what is at stake here is a combination of individual attitudes with social cognition. Recall that this form of alleged irreducibility is the distinguishing feature of immediate co-feeling in the taxonomy in chapter 2 of the nature of sympathy. What we have here is another case of immediate co-feeling – one that is concerned with a view on what it is like to be a nation rather than with a view on what it is like to be a couple. Shared feelings are depicted here as collective emotions – emotions with a collective, a national subject – in a normatively most suspicious way. Looking at this case, we may fully agree with Connor’s suspicion that what we have here is an expression of a political agenda of “counting-for-one” (though it certainly seems inadequate to equate Scheler’s nationalism with the totalitarianism Connor invokes to label the agenda of the theory of collective emotions).

²³ M. SCHELER, *Der Krieg als Gesamterlebnis*, GW IV, 272 ff, my translation.

It thus seems rather obvious that Scheler's concept of co-feeling here serves the nationalist political agenda of advocating the war efforts, and looking back from here to the apparently innocent example of the grieving parents, one might suspect that there is some normative agenda at work in this small-scale case, too – a certain view of what marriage should be, a certain concept of souls internally unified in sentiments. If ideology consists in hiding normative agendas behind factual statements, it may seem that the concept of co-feeling is just that: a piece of solid ideology.

It is true that many philosophers of the time somehow participated in the August Madness – a notable exception is Bertrand Russell, who has a touching depiction of those events in his autobiography. However, Scheler differs from many more or less incidental philosophical war enthusiasts by investing no less than some of his key conceptual tools into that cause – a fact that should certainly not be bypassed without mentioning if these concepts are revived today for our current purposes – Scheler's normative agenda resides deeply in those terms. In the light of this perspective, Scheler's perhaps most convincing move against reductionism appears in quite a different light. Scheler's move against reductionism is the claim that co-feeling is not a combination of individual emotion and a structure of social cognition. In the formulation Scheler gives in his war propaganda quoted above, he makes plain that he is not simply arguing against a more or less contingent misunderstanding, but rather against the very way of misconceiving of human social life which Scheler believes to be the worldview of the enemy – the “mistaken construction” is now labeled a “piece construction”, and comparing this to Scheler's other pieces of war propaganda, it becomes apparent that the reductionism he criticizes is really the “English” view of the social: it is, in Scheler's view, a misunderstanding of human community as society. This passage thus echoes the core idea of Scheler's *The Genius of War and the German War*, which is really just a German nationalist anti-English polemic to go with Ernst Lissauer's infamous “Hymn of Hate against England” – a poem which also invokes the idea of co-feeling: “We love as one, we hate as one!” – “Wir lieben vereint, wir hassen vereint, wir haben alle nur einen Feind: England!”

In this light, Scheler's conception of co-feeling is clearly a well-

suiting case in point for Connor's suspicion that the idea of genuinely collective emotions is "a literally totalitarian form of counting-for-one". Scheler's conception is very clearly a part of the German nationalist history of the conception of the "soul of the people" as the driving force of national unification and collective self-assertion. Johann Gottfried Herder, who invented the term "nationalism", coined the term "Volksseele" – soul of a people – to socialize Kantian transcendental philosophy and its solitary ego. That idea has a long and problematic history, embedded in which we find Scheler's conception. To be sure, the darkest years of that tradition were still to come at the time of Scheler's writings, and Scheler differs from some of the later excrescences of that tradition by emphasizing the absolute dignity of the individual even in his war writings. Still, his belligerent nationalism obviously informs his thinking on shared emotions.

3) *What's the Lesson to be Learned?*

The first section argued against the view advocated by Connor that there cannot be genuinely collective emotions, and Scheler's conception of immediate co-feeling was claimed to be important for an adequate understanding of collective emotions, especially because of Scheler's strong conception of emotional sharing, and because of his stout non-reductionism. In the second part, we found confirmation for Connor's suspicion that conceptions of collective emotion are expressive of a political agenda; Scheler's concept of co-feeling serves his belligerent nationalism in his war writings.

How do these two points add up? How do these observations about the ideology of Scheler's war writings relate to the phenomenological ontology of collective emotions? It is obviously somewhat dissatisfying to refer to Scheler's concept of immediate co-feeling, as it is often done in the current literature, without even acknowledging its ideological context in *some* way, and I myself plead guilty in this regard. Several authors have appealed to Scheler's notion of immediate co-feeling in the recent debate, and have done so by discussing Scheler's example of the parents' grief – yet none of us has even mentioned Scheler's view of national war enthusiasm.²⁴

²⁴ Cf. H.B. SCHMID, *Shared Feelings. Towards a Phenomenology of Collective Affec-*

But what is the lesson that we should learn from Scheler's war writings?

There is a variety of potential routes to take, and the following mentions just three of them – starting with a defensive reaction, proceeding to a “neutral” position, and ending with the welcoming attitude and indeed embrace which I would like to advocate.

The defensive reaction is simply to deny the objection by means of a strong appeal to the *vact/value*-distinction, and it comes with the option to strike back and turn the tables on the ideology issue. This reaction insists that however deplorable the affective disposition of those moved by war enthusiasm might have been, it simply *was* immediate co-feeling, from a purely descriptive standpoint, and that collective emotions are not only real in places where we like them – as perhaps in the case of the two parents –, but also in places where we don't like them – as in the case of national war enthusiasm. From this point of view, the table can now be turned on Connor on the ideology issue. It is, from this point of view, his denial of the possibility of collective emotion that is truly ideological: his dislike of collective emotions is disguised as a factual impossibility claim. And whatever else ideology might be, it is certainly that: a forced fit of factual claims to one's political views. It is one thing to dislike cases in which a plurality of people “count as one”, it is another thing to deny that they can be legitimately counted this way.

Yet it seems hard to deny that Scheler's short cut from intimate parent relations to national unity is suspicious, and really a huge sociological leap that can only be driven by a strong sense of purpose. The drive behind Scheler's conceptual transfer obviously is to derive from war enthusiasm an underlying reality of social life that is comparable to the way in which a parent couple's life is shared – a reality which nationalists may desire, but which obviously does not do justice to the plurality and complexity of evaluations at work among the participating individuals and such diverse groups that compose a nation. Even the critical conception of the war enthusiasm as “August Madness” that is still often appealed to in current historical research may project too much

tive Intentionality, in H.B. SCHMID, *Plural Action*, Dordrecht 2009, 59-85; A. KREBS, *Vater und Mutter stehen an der Leiche des geliebten Kindes*, «Allgemeine Zeitschrift für Philosophie» 35/1 (2010), 9-43; D. ZAHAVI, *Self and Other. Exploring Subjectivity, Empathy, and Shame*, Oxford, 2014: ID., *You, Me, and We: The Sharing of Emotional Experience*, «Journal of Consciousness Studies», 22 (2015), 84-101.

unity into the attitudes of the participants. It is hard to deny that what Scheler does in his war writings with his use of the concept of immediate co-feeling is to project an image of how, in his view, there *should* have been a collective of the sort of an affectively felt national unity onto the level of socio-psychological facts. And that is just what ideology is: a systematic disguise of a political agenda behind factual claims.

A second and more neutral route is thus to admit what seems obvious, and to grant that there is something suspicious with Scheler's use of the term – but to see the mistake simply as a *misapplication*. In this view, everything is o.k. with the notion of immediate co-feeling as such, just that it should be kept to cases of the parents sort instead of applying it to larger-scale phenomena. Whatever crowd emotions there were at the beginning of World War I does not fall under this concept. This is the route Scheler himself seems to have chosen after the war. In the revised edition of the *Nature of Sympathy*, he suggests that the war enthusiasm was *not really* a case of immediate co-feeling after all, but rather a case of emotional identification.²⁵

This reply heavily relies on the distinction between the intension and the extension of the concept. It is, in this view, not in the intensional characteristics of the concept that the problem lies, but rather in its extension to the case of the war. In this view, what we have here is just another case of a good conceptual tool used for suspicious purposes – a version of the good old bread knife argument against arm restrictions.

The distinctions between fact and value as well as between the intension and the extension of a concept make good sense according to a conception of concept according to which concepts are characterized by necessary and sufficient conditions. They do not make as much sense based on a conception of concepts that relies on paradigmatic cases, resemblances, and “thick” interrelations between descriptive and evaluative elements. In the social domain, and especially where such sensitive phenomena as our feelings are concerned, it seems hard to dismiss the relevance of a paradigm-based conception of concepts. After all, this seems to be the way in which our emotional registers develop: in social referencing, in reading romantic novels and watching movies we come to calibrate our emotions, and thus to affectively evaluate our world in

²⁵ I am grateful to Matthias Schloßberger for pointing this out to me.

the way we do in the light of our concerns.

It is often assumed that a sharp distinction between ontological considerations and political views in the social world, between how we think that the social world is, and the various views of how we should be is part and parcel of the very idea of social ontology. The idea is taken to be that there is a way of talking about social facts that does not engage normative views, or rather engages “independently existing values” or objective essences rather than political standpoints. Though Scheler’s largely seems to be some such view, perhaps there is a different way to respond to Connor’s challenge: an embracing welcome rather than a defense.

Basic social facts are not independent of our views thereof. Our social world does not exist independently of us – rather, it is what we make it, and we make it according to different historical and current projects. Our basic social notions are expressive of those projects, and it is naïve to think of such categories as group, community, society without taking into account the thick projects in which they are embedded. Neglecting this is certainly a deplorable shortcoming of much of current social ontology, and Connor’s challenge reminds us of this shortcoming. At the same time, this does not mean that social ontology collapses to the history of ideas, or social history. Social ontology is not bound to a description of our actual current and historical ways of making the social world. Rather, it is a systematic exploration of the space of the possibilities and impossibilities opened up or shut close by the attitudes, conceptual tools and practices with which we construct our social world, an endeavor which reveals what seems necessary and essential about our social facts to be contingent, and thus opens up a perspective on how our social world could be different.

This finally suggests a different response to Connor’s challenge. It is neither to turn the tables on Connor, nor to remain coolly reserved concerning matters of the extension of the concept. Rather, it is to welcome the challenge and embrace it as an invitation to engage in the history of our social notions in general, and the idea of collective emotion in particular, and to see how these notions develop in conjunction with a wide variety of views on how we should live together. In this venture, engaging in the phenomenology and ontology of collective emotion turns out

to mean to participate in a continued contest that revolves around the idea of something like a unified evaluative perspective or shared emotional standpoint. Knowing how this contest directly involves to the history of German nationalism does not end the contest, but allows us to act with more care, and better knowledge of what is at stake.

ABSTRACT

One conception of collective emotion is that of one token emotional disposition, episode, or attitude with many participants. Such emotions are a collective's. This conception has been criticized on phenomenological and ontological grounds, and it has recently been criticized as a piece of political ideology. This paper focuses on Max Scheler's conception of collective emotion which some of those who are sympathetic to the idea in the recent debate have endorsed. It is argued that while it withstands the phenomenological and ontological objections, the issue of political ideology has to be taken seriously.

