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The Issue of Idealization in *The Philosophy of Money* by Georg Simmel

Abstract: The main question of the text concerns the status of value in Georg Simmel's thinking. According to Simmel, values are submitted to "idealization," which can be considered a kind of "constructed essentialism." Together with the concept of construction, "constructed essentialism" first appeared implicitly in Kant's theses on the human rational equipment containing necessary inborn dispositions and, particularly, in his theses on transcendental schematism. However, it was Fichte and Schelling who applied the term "construction" to the description of cognitive processes. In his theses concerning the idealization of values as conventionally accepted, socially and economically constructed relations, Simmel refers to the anthropological, cognitive equipment: to the human propensity to seek patterns, ideals, and even ideas. Such a formulation of the process of idealization spreads Simmel's concept of value dialectically between constructivism and anthropological essentialism.

Keywords: value, essence, essentialism, construction, idea, ideal, idealization

Ideas and values are treated today as a kind of commodity, an offering on the symbolic-goods market. Although treating values in this way is often criticized as being instrumental manipulation, it can be legitimized on the basis of Georg Simmel's philosophy of money (*Philosophie des Geldes*, 1900; Simmel 1930; Simmel 2004), which begins with subjective concepts of values. It should also be added that the coexistence, in contemporary culture, of many equally legitimate but different, non-coherent, sometimes complementary and also mutually exclusive values, is difficult to explain by concepts that assume the objective existence of values making up a certain harmonized order (although a certain agreement regarding them is postulated by the proponents of differential ethics in a multicultural society, such as Charles Taylor and Luc Ferry). In this text, I consider Simmel's description of the status of values, which are submitted to the process of "idealization." I propose that his approach should be viewed as a variant of "constructed essentialism".

According to Simmel, values are submitted to an "idealization," which may be considered a kind of "constructed essentialism." Simmel writes about "*ein Ideal*" (Simmel 1930: 99) and he employs the term "*idealisieren*." "Constructed essentialism" would appear together with the concept of construction: first, implicitly in the theses of Immanuel Kant, in regard to the human rational equipment as certain anthropological, necessary inborn dispositions and, particularly, in his theses on transcendental schematism. Johann G. Fichte and Friedrich W. J. Schelling explicitly used the term "construction" to describe cognitive processes and the mind's representations, which adequately grasp not only single beings, but also the relations between them. In his theses concerning the idealization of values as

conventionally accepted, socially and economically constructed relations, Simmel refers to the anthropological, cognitive equipment—to the propensities of human beings to seek patterns, ideals, and even ideas. Simmel emphasizes that

What is common to value and reality stands above them: namely the contents, which Plato called ‘ideas,’ the qualitative, that which can be signified and expressed in our concepts of reality and value, and which can enter into either one or the other series. Below these two categories lies what is common to both: the soul, which absorbs the one or produces the other in its mysterious unity (Simmel 2004: 59).

Such an idealization deals with values and seems to be dialectically defined by Simmel—between constructivism and anthropological essentialism, as expressed in cognitive processes, but also in other psychological processes, first of all in emotions. Simmel consistently appeals to dialectical relations, but, following Georg W. F. Hegel, he tries to go beyond them in search of a third intermediary element. He seems to present a third medial standpoint between essentialism and constructivism: a constructivist position strongly marked by essentialism—a position that presupposes the irrevocability of anthropological equipment.

Constructed Essentialism

What is this “constructed essentialism”? It appears along with the concept of “construction.” First, it is implicitly assumed in Immanuel Kant’s theses on the rational, anthropological equipment as certain necessary innate dispositions, and particularly in his theses on transcendental schematism. It should be remembered that in his *Critique of Pure Reason* (*Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, 1781, 1787), Kant uses among others the term “*prototypon*” to describe the “ideal,” as distinguished from the “idea” (“The transcendental ideal,” “*prototypon transcendentalis*”; Kant 1998: 553). In the *Critique of Judgment* (*Kritik der Urteilskraft*, 1790), beauty was the Kantian example of an idea as well as an ideal, that is, the result of the idealization process (Kant 1987, § 17 *On the Ideal of Beauty*). Beauty as an idea conditions a subjective judgment of taste, while as an ideal (*prototypon*) it is not considered an assumed, formal, transcendental idea enabling valuation, but rather as a certain temporal, accomplished norm. It allows the characterization of that which is beautiful not only via reference to the universal rules of the subjective judgment of taste but also in reference to a norm established socially for the present. The norm consists of idealization, therefore it is evaluated as that which is valuable—it becomes socially obligatory and combines the idea of beauty with particular qualities of objects, impressions, images experienced by means of the senses. These qualities are submitted to idealization; they make it possible to qualify beauty as an ideal accomplished empirically in the creation and reception of works of art.

Constructed essentialism can be found in assumptions about the principle of being as that which is the essence, the source, the permanent, the constant, at the foundations as the *arche*. However, in this case, the position of essentialism coincides with the concepts of epistemological constructivism and nominalism. As is known, essentialism is most often found in the assumptions and theses of Platonic idealism and Aristotelian substantialism, that is, in the concept that considers substance to be the basis and principle of being, the source of itself, which has no other bases beside itself and which defines itself (Baruch Spinoza).

Both these representations of essence as the core of being can be found in later—medieval and modern—concepts of being. John Locke’s notion of the primary qualities of being as what is empirically recognizable, and what is ascribed constant occurrence in being, was a departure from substantialism, due, among other reasons, to nominalist—rather than realist—theoretical and cognitive assumptions. Substance began to be considered a postulate of ontology and epistemology, thus allowing the regularity of the laws of nature to be taken into account—not exactly in reference to a substantive principle but in categories of empirical regularities. The state of these is given and studied in experience of the here and now, and the results call for confirmation in further research. David Hume’s criticism of subjective substance (consciousness) and objective substance (the permanent equipment of an individual being and the type of beings) explicitly questions the theses of essentialism. Essentialism was next challenged by theses on construction. There have been attempts to reconcile these two positions, showing essentialism to be the result of processes of idealization. The essentialist principle is still framed as the recognizable—although not completely known—basis of being, and furthermore as that which gives being—meaning and what connects with the additional meanings given to it. The essentialist principle becomes evaluative in reference both to the laws of nature and to the laws reasonably established by humans (in culture), and the meaning ascribed to it becomes normative (as a point of reference of assessments) and even prescriptive (it is a model). The transition from essentialism to constructed essentialism is clearly visible in the phenomenology developing Edmund Husserl’s theses—the assumptions regarding the *eidōs* were supplemented with nominalist assumptions of structuralism and other linguistic and semiotic studies (including those by Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Michel Henry, and Jean-Luc Marion), and in the theses of Marc Richir concerning “wild essences” (“*les Wesen sauvages*”; Richir 1991: 234), which are difficult to grasp cognitively and are consequently inaccessible in scientific cognition, while still constituting the ontological principle.

It should be mentioned that at the beginning of the twentieth century, and later as well, essentialism and constructivism were considered to be two antagonistic investigative standpoints, that is, the essentialism of phenomenology and the constructivism of functionalism, structuralism, and pragmatic language theory. However, in numerous investigative approaches, we find a combination of essentialist and constructivist elements—for example, in neo-Kantianism and in hermeneutics, the theses of which are based on premises regarding a certain primordial, innate anthropological apparatus: particularly the rational character of human reasoning and action, which legitimizes the constructs created and constituted by human beings (e.g., symbolic structures and their interpretations). Initially, a distinction must be made between constructions related to the being itself and the thought constructions—idealization as construction pertains to the latter. Simultaneously, two methodological strategies should be indicated: grasping idealization as a construction (in neo-Kantianism, as well as in Georg Simmel’s work) and grasping construction as a prescriptive and normative idealization (relating to legal rules, as well as to the natural regularities described by the pure sciences). Additionally, it should be noted that the “essence in action” appearing in the theses of some philosophers of existence (Maurice Merleau-Ponty) is different from “constructed essentialism”.

On the other hand, the concept of construction is based primarily on epistemological theses concerning the subject of cognition, extracting not exactly the “essence of the thing” but the regularities of the being, the proper cognitive equivalent of which—the object of cognition—is constructed, that is, recognized and learned as part of experience and rational generalization, depending on the human anthropological equipment. The issue of the construction of the object of cognition had been discussed by Locke and Hume (the issue of complex ideas), but it was in the philosophy of Kant that the cognitive construct became one of the fundamental philosophical issues. Kant’s schematism, though, applied to the construction of the object of cognition, goes beyond the issue of epistemology, because theses about the experience and the pre-experiential, the transcendental, are in general rational and therefore in part anthropological and they refer, for example, to the creative activities of humans (e.g., the role of empirical imagination and transcendental imagination). The problem of construction thus also applies to the cognitive subject itself—to the equipment and shaping of cognitive abilities.

However, it is Johann G. Fichte and Friedrich W. J. Schelling who use the term “construction” to describe cognitive processes that result in presentations—representations of the mind adequately capturing not only individual beings but also the relations between them, in which the human-subject of cognition seeks consistency and regularity. Fichte and Schelling’s constructivist theses were primarily methodological—they were certain “methods of philosophical construction” (Breazeale 2009: 3). It must be stressed that their concepts of construction did not oppose “essentialism”—such an opposition appears today and is the result of simplifications, because it does not take into account the necessary assumptions regarding the ontological foundations of cognitive constructs. It should be emphasized that it was the concepts of these philosophers, at the turn of the eighteenth to nineteenth centuries (Breazeale 2009: 3) that inspired the constructivist concepts of neo-Kantianism and modern constructivism (among other things, constructivism in the methodology of Hayden White’s historical studies and in the hard sciences, including mathematics). Thus, Fichte postulated the method of an a priori, intuitive “intellectual” construct, which would lead, among other things, to the appointment or rather construction of a new philosophical system (this is one of the ways in which this is a genetic method). Fichte first presented his theses on construction in his *Zurich Lectures* (1793–1794) and later, among other places, in *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo* (1796–1799; Fichte 1992) and in *Sonnenklarer Bericht an das größere Publikum über das eigentliche Wesen der neuesten Philosophie: Ein Versuch, die Leser zum Verstehen zu zwingen* (1801; Fichte 1987). The goal of this construction method would ultimately be the truth of cognition about the self-conscious subjectivity and the world of its experience. Schelling, on the other hand, presented his theses about construction primarily in *System des transcendentalen Idealismus* (1800; Schelling 1978) and in *Über die Konstruktion in der Philosophie* (1802; Schelling 2008), in writings on the philosophy of nature, and in lectures on history as constructed knowledge (not “manifested” knowledge, as Hegel states). The issue of “constructed essentialism” appears in particular in Schelling’s concept of the construction of history as a science of the past (*Vorlesungen über die Methode des akademischen Studiums*, 1802–1803; the eighth lecture *Über die historische Konstruktion des Christentums* and the tenth lecture *Über das Studium der Historie und der Jurisprudenz*, Schelling 2013). Schelling argues for the necessary ideal-

ization of specific historical narratives, and thus of constructions, as idealized models of moral conduct (this particularly applies to the “sacred history” of biblical stories).

Schelling’s intentions went beyond Fichte’s theses. First and foremost, Schelling combined construction with the investigative approach of the Philosopher of Nature and assumed that in the construction method he should also go beyond his own subjectivity, “to obtain a genuinely ‘objective’ and a priori intellectual intuition of nature itself” (Breazeale 2009: 17). In Schelling’s works, various concepts of construction, referring to what is transcendental or to the sphere of nature, can be found. Schelling makes the following assumptions: 1) he considers what is “absolute,” that is, reason-based (neither objective nor subjective), to be the starting and reference point of construction, combining his method not with scientific research but with philosophy (which is clearly separate) as the basis of the whole methodology; 2) the goal of construction is a new Philosophy of Identity, the beginning of which is the act of abstraction—“one must view philosophy as a kind of ‘primordial knowing’ or *Urwissen*, a ‘knowing of knowing,’ which contains within itself all other instances of cognition, as particulars included in ‘universal’ or ‘absolute’ cognition”—we must “think of absolute cognition as identical to the absolute itself” (Breazeale 2009: 18); and 3) philosophical construction allows for the perception of what is universal in the individual, and the infinite in the finite—and ultimately, what is individual and particular manifests in the universal. The “product of philosophical construction” is a comprehensive, closed system of ideas in which all differences between the individual are merely ideal, while the essential reality is one and identified with itself (Breazeale 2009: 29).

Thus construction as a method of philosophical cognition is not, according to Schelling, genetic or explanatory, and it does not take away from the progress of scientific knowledge, like Fichte’s construction method. It is “demonstrative,” that is, it shows the true nature of things and allows everything to appear. It would therefore be a kind of vision, a way of looking at things—a way of seeing them “in the idea” and seeing the idea “in the absolute” (Breazeale 2009: 30) that would reconcile the external view with the internal view.

As is known, Kant writes about the ideal distinguished from the Idea (the “ideal of pure reason”—the *Ideal der Vernunft*, the *ens realissimum* as the ideal of reason, the ideal in general and the transcendental ideal—the *prototypon transcendentale*; Kant 1998, chapter *The ideal of pure reason*). Similarly, Søren Kierkegaard separates the idea from the ideal, which is the result of idealization; the starting point of his position—which combines essentialism with nominalism—is a consistent essentialist attitude, that is, the essentialist assumptions present, among other places, in his concept of the human being. This concept applies to the essential human needs that result in the creation of ideals and personal patterns, which are a kind of personalization of ideals. Kierkegaard follows Schelling, who warned that the human ability to construct the object of cognition and the object of desire may result in the idealization of things, people, and events that are important to the individual person, but accidental. It is therefore necessary to choose the object that undergoes idealization, which would be the appropriate model, and its value (the value ascribed to it) will be right and normatively proper. Therefore, considering the concepts of history as cognitive constructs, Schelling postulated referring to “sacred history” (the proper, edifying, ethical pattern of conduct). Kierkegaard also cites the argument of “sacred history” as a story that is always up-to-date, beyond time and its temporary conditioning, and pattern-forming, referring to

the essential in being (e.g., *Philosophiske Smuler eller En Smule Philosophie. Af Johannes Climacus. Udgivet af S. Kierkegaard*, 1844; Kierkegaard 1974).

It should be emphasized that elements of such an idealist understanding of construction—like those in Kant, Fichte, Schelling, and Kierkegaard—can be found in Simmel’s work. However, Simmel employs the term “*Konstruktion*” not only in the common meaning of the word but also in reference to the aforementioned construction of knowledge in general, including historical knowledge and metaphysics (Simmel 1930: 294; Simmel 2004: 281¹). In *The Philosophy of Money*, Simmel presents his thesis regarding the construction of knowledge and scientific theories explicitly. Simmel writes about “historical manifestations of our theoretical constructions” (Simmel 2004: 167; Simmel 1930: 151²). However, these manifestations are not a confirmation of an objective, necessary order of history, but rather of constructed orders, that is, orders proposed on the basis of adopted premises. As in the Hegelian tradition, Simmel refers to the concept of history as a kind of determining process (“particular historical conditions”; Simmel 2004: 145–146), but he also writes, after Kant, about “an empirical and historical” construction of concrete social facts and psychological phenomena (e.g., Simmel 2004: 112).

Main Assumptions and Theses of Simmel

In his theses on the idealization of values as agreed-upon relations—and thus socially and economically constructed—Georg Simmel refers not exactly to the anthropological, cognitive equipment but to the tendencies of humans to seek ideas but also models and ideals (Simmel 2004: “the ideal of greatest personal freedom”: 410; “the ideals of quality and justice”: 425; “the moral ideals”: 427; “its highest ethical ideals”: 439; “objective expediency and ideals”: 440; “cognitive ideal”: 448; “the ideal of numerical calculability”: 449; “the ideals of happiness, intelligence and beauty”: 450; “a cultural ideal” and “an autonomous ideal”: 452; “our epistemological ideal,” “an ideal realm of theoretical values,” “ideal form,” “cognitive ideal”: 455). Such a framing of the concept of idealization, that is, of the idealizing process, dialectically expands Simmel’s concept of values between constructivism and anthropological essentialism, expressed in cognitive processes but primarily in mental processes in general, among which Simmel ascribes a particular role to emotions. It should be emphasized that in the main text of his *Philosophie des Geldes* Simmel only twice employs the German term “*idealisieren*” (Simmel 1930: “*verallgemeinernden und idealisierenden Momentes*”: 148; “*das Geld ist so sehr zu einer reinen Form und Verhältnisbegriff idealisiert*”: 182; resp. Simmel 2004: “the generalizing and idealizing element”: 165; “money has been idealized to a pure form and a concept of relation”: 192). Simmel also employs the term “*ideell*” in his *Vorrede* (Simmel 1930: “*ideellsten Potenzen des Daseins*”: VII; in the English translation, “the most idealized powers of existence”—Simmel 2004: 53). However, in consideration of value and valuation, he refers repeatedly

¹ “*Nur der Metaphysik mag die Konstruktion absolut eigenschaftsloser Wesenheiten gelingen, die, nach rein arithmetischen Verhältnissen zusammengeordnet und bewegt, das Spiel der Welt erzeugen.*” (Simmel 1930: 294); resp. “Only metaphysics can construct entities completely lacking in quality, which perform the play of the world according to purely arithmetical relations” (Simmel 2004: 281).

² “*Es handelt sich jetzt um die historische Ausgestaltung des prinzipiell Konstruierten*” (Simmel 1930: 151).

to grasping ideality and reality as “two moments” in the process of determining values and that which is considered to be valuable. Consequently, in referring to dialectical relations in *The Philosophy of Money*, Simmel tries—in the manner of Hegel—to go beyond them in his search for a third intermediate element. He seems to present a third, intermediate standpoint between essentialism and constructivism.

It should be emphasized that this is how Simmel expands his theses between the issues of truth and confusion, of illusion, proposing in their place a slightly “softened” position comparing truthfulness with illusoriness (the illusoriness of deduction; [Simmel 2004: 103](#))—a position that we currently find in many concepts that depart from essentialism, which is identified with an impractical and unpragmatic research attitude, inadequate for describing complex reality, particularly in the social sciences and humanities. Paradoxically, however, in the relations between truthfulness and illusoriness that are typical of constructivism, we find the same drawbacks and worries that made us move away from essentialism: the threat of doubt, of lack of belief in imponderables as necessary assumptions, and the temporary character of the state of research. Thus the position of “constructed essentialism” appears to be a solution that—by revealing the anthropological need for an essence, an idea, a belief in certain assumptions—shows the processes of idealization as the construction of such assumptions, considered, at least temporarily (constructivism) to be certain (essentialism). We find an announcement of these solutions in Simmel’s *The Philosophy of Money*, where he tries to reconcile and actualize 1) the theses of essentialism, which is referred to, among other things, as Platonic idealism (along with the concept of the Idea of Truth), 2) with the theses of constructivism, leading—according to him—not exactly to relativistic theses but to theses searching for truthfulness, and thus to a position that suspends doubt, if only temporarily, and pushes skepticism to the past or to the future.

In *The Philosophy of Money*, Simmel presents his own concept of values and acknowledges the supremacy of subjectivity in their establishment. He stresses that “every value that we experience is a sentiment” and “value is never a ‘quality’ of the objects, but a judgment upon them which remains inherent in the subject” ([Simmel 2004: resp. 65, 60](#)). He links the act of establishment itself with what is emotional in humans, with a conscious experience (*Erlebnis*), but also with the unconscious as a realm submitted to emotions ([Simmel 2004: “unconscious a priori”](#): 132; “the general unconscious basis”: 133; “the unconsciously operating factor”: 134; “the unconscious power of adaptation of the human species”: 157; “the unconscious search for an ultimate purpose of life”: 363).

This series [of the human cognitive process—M.G.] begins with a succession of phenomena in which only what is common to all is taken into account, only the basis that all the phenomena share, is considered. At the other end of the scale, only the distinctive features of each phenomenon, the absolute individuality, enter our consciousness, while the general and fundamental elements remain unconscious. Between these two extremes, there exists at various levels those points or aspects of the total phenomenon upon which the greatest attention is focused ([Simmel 2004: 133](#)).

In proposing his concept of values, Simmel was inspired by contemporary economic thinking, as well as by phenomenology and psychoanalysis. He considered the basic factor in the construction of values to be that which is individual—subjectivity along with the element of the unconscious.

The conscious intentions and foresight of individuals would not suffice to maintain the harmony that economic activity displays alongside its fearful discords and inadequacies. We have to assume that there are unconscious experiences and calculations which accumulate during the historical development of the economy and which regulate its course. It should be remembered, however, that unconscious conceptions do not provide a satisfactory explanation, but are only aids to understanding that are actually based upon a fallacy (Simmel 2004: 157).³

He adds: “In our present state of knowledge it is unavoidable, and thus legitimate, to interpret the formation of values—their consolidation and fluctuation—as unconscious processes which follow the norms and forms of conscious reasoning” (Simmel 2004: 158).

According to Simmel, subjective, individual valuations undergo objectification in the process of the self-recognition of the subject and its cognition, and then in the process of creating an intersubjective social reality: “the contents that are realized in the objective world and also exist in us as subjective representations have, in addition, a peculiar ideal dignity” (Simmel 2004: 64). The initially subjective valuation subsequently undergoes social and cultural objectivization, assuming the form of the postulated and normative values considered to be objective. Simmel believes that, in being guided by our own individual decisions and assessments in making everyday choices, we forget about the impulsive, emotional sources of values (needs, desires), to which all of us are *de facto* referring.

Why then do we assign values, and why do values appear at all in our referring to ourselves and the world? Simmel—one of the protagonists of the philosophy of life—responds that “[v]aluation as a real psychological occurrence is part of the natural world; but what we mean by valuation, its conceptual meaning, is something independent of this world; is not part of it, but is rather the whole world viewed from a particular vantage point” (Simmel 2004: 57). Simmel recognizes that the value of a given object is based on the fact that “it is desired,” but within “the practical world, however, in relation to its inner order and intelligibility, the origin of the object itself, and its being desired by the subject, are correlative terms—the two aspects of this process of differentiation which splits the immediate unity of the process of enjoyment” (Simmel 2004: 63). He argues that “[o]ften enough it is some expediency in the direction of our practical activities that leads us to regard an object as valuable, and it is not in fact the significance of the object but the possible subjective satisfaction that excites us” (Simmel 2004: 66).⁴

However, Simmel opposes philosophical concepts that contrast the subject and the object, writing about their unity in the epistemological act of a subject’s self-recognition as an object of a sort (as a certain objectivity in the process of objectivization). At the same time, he opposes the necessity to make distinctions between the subjective and objective (also in relation to values), because the “content itself” of human thinking, “as a logical and conceptual entity, likewise lies beyond the distinction between subjective and objective reality” (Simmel 2004: 61). Ultimately, value, as well as representation, appears *de facto* in the relation of the subject and object, and has a primarily relational character. “Subject and

³ However, Simmel subsequently writes that actually “we know nothing of the processes that produce a psychic effect without conscious antecedents,” and “the notion of unconscious representations, experiences and inferences only expresses the fact that the effects occur as if they were the result of conscious motivations and ideas” (Simmel 2004: 158).

⁴ “When an identical need rejects a number of possible satisfactions, perhaps all but one, and when, therefore, it is not satisfaction as such but satisfaction by a specific object that is desired, there begins a fundamental reorientation from the subject to the object” (Simmel 2004: 67).

object are born in the same act: logically, by presenting the conceptual ideal content first as a content of representation, and then as a content of objective reality; psychologically, when the still ego-less representation, in which person and object are undifferentiated, becomes divided and gives rise to a distance between the self and its object, through which each of them becomes a separate entity,” namely essence (Simmel 2004: 62). Simmel refers to the valuations made in everyday practice, which results in a “metaphysical sublimation of value” (Simmel 2004: 66), including idealistic concepts of the existence of value. At the same time, valuation is a process that takes place within culture, which Simmel understands, after Wilhelm Dilthey, as the “lifeworld” (*Lebenswelt*).

An important context, which Simmel addresses indirectly, is the assortment of neo-Kantian theses by Ernst Cassirer replacing the concept of substance with the concept of a function (Simmel 2004, chapter *The historical development of money from substance to function*: 167). Cassirer, as it is known, questioned the substantial treatment of being and mind, introducing in its place the separate category of function (beside the contemporary functionalism in sociology and anthropology; cf. Cassirer 1910; Cassirer 1923). Additionally, structure was taken to be a type of schematic construction within the context of the redefined Kantian schematism. Cassirer applied the transcendental method, used for science by Kantianism and neo-Kantianism, to the study and description of the specific human universe of culture. He framed culture as an assemblage of certain ideal worlds (art, morality, religion, myth, language), designated by human beings as analogical to the creation of science. The link between Simmel’s and Cassirer’s conceptions might be subject matter for another text.

Essentialism—Truth and Illusion

As mentioned, Georg Simmel believed that this category of value evidently—even “obviously”—remains “beyond” the objective–subjective alternative, because

it denies the relation to a subject that is indispensable for the existence of an ‘object.’ It is rather a third term, an ideal concept which enters into the duality but is not exhausted by it. In conformity with the practical sphere to which it belongs, it has a particular form of relationship to the subject which does not exist for the merely abstract content of our theoretical concepts. This form may be described as a claim or demand (Simmel 2004: 65).

The category of value undergoes idealization in a necessary way, by the power of the claim to what is universal and objective (socially and culturally sanctioned). “The value that attaches to any object, person, relationship or happening demands recognition. This demand exists, as an event, only within ourselves as subjects; but in accepting it we sense that we are not merely satisfying a claim imposed by ourselves upon ourselves, or merely acknowledging a quality of the object” (Simmel 2004: 65). According to Simmel, the “metaphysical sublimation of value” concerns the value that exists in the consciousness of subjects and the objectivity that arises in the psychological process of valuation as its object (Simmel 2004: 66). Simmel assumes that this process takes place along the increase of the distance between the consumer and “the cause of his enjoyment,” that is, the object of desire and demand. “The differences in valuation which have to be distinguished as subjective and objective, originate from such variations in distance, measured not in terms of

enjoyment, in which the distance disappears, but in terms of desire, which is engendered by the distance and seeks to overcome it" (Simmel 2004: 66). Thus their source can be mistakenly sought in the autonomous subject or in the object, and not in reference to the original and primary relation between them, to the intentional relation (of desire, of need) having a cognitive but initially emotional character.

It must be stressed that Simmel directly links the issues of idealization and those of value, which—as mental representation—is invoked in relations involving intentional reference to “reality” (a term borrowed from Wilhelm Dilthey). Simultaneously, Simmel considers reality and value to be distinct, “mutually independent categories,” through which “our conceptions,” the contents of our representations become “images of the world” (Simmel 2004: 56). Reality and value are “two different languages”; they are conceptual orders that can be used to describe the “contents of the world,” or two synthesizing perspectives—cognitive and evaluative (Simmel 2004: 59).⁵ Moreover, objective cognition of reality, of real being, can only arise through some valuation. Value is the correlate of the desiring Self (Simmel 2004: 64),⁶ while the relations of value and subject are characterized by demands or claims. The processes of human cognition and valorization (resp. descriptive and prescriptive or normative) concern constructed objects as psychic phenomena: rational and emotional. Simmel argues that “[j]ust as the world of being is my representation, so the world of value is my demand. However, in spite of the logical-physical necessity that every demand expects to be satisfied by an object, the psychological structure of demand is such that in most cases it is focused upon the satisfaction itself, and the object becomes a matter of indifference so long as it satisfies the need” (Simmel 2004: 66). The subjective events of impulse and enjoyment “become objectified in value,” namely, “there develop from the objective conditions obstacles, deprivations, demands for some kind of ‘price’ through which the cause or content of impulse and enjoyment is first separated from us and becomes, by this very act, an object and a value” (Simmel 2004: 73). Simmel points to the “proof of value,” which “is only the transference of an existing value to a new object. It does not reveal the essence of value, or the reason why value was originally attached to the object from which it is transferred to others” (Simmel 2004: 58).

Such statements grasp valuation as a condition of objective cognition, and yet the cognition of the nearest reality, in the framework of colloquial thinking and scientific cognition, requires reference to the concept of truth. Idealization of value is well connected to the regulative character of value—both in terms of cognition and action. Truth as a value—unlike the truth considered in the cognitive order, that is, in the intentional reference to beings and relations between them—is not dialectically linked with the oppositional category of delusion (as in Platonic thinking). Delusion and illusion would remain a threat, but thanks to the idealization of value, the danger of doubt is dismissed. However, it must be added that this concerns the order of value, not the order of being, of an objectively given real-

⁵ “Reality and value are, as it were, two different languages by which the logically related contents of the world, valid in their ideal unity, are made comprehensible to the unitary soul, or the languages in which the soul can express the pure image of these contents which lies beyond their differentiation and opposition” (Simmel 2004: 59).

⁶ “Value, which appears at the same time and in the same process of differentiation as the desiring Ego and as its correlate, is subordinate to yet another category. It is the same category as applies to the object that is conceived in theoretical representations” (Simmel 2004: 64).

ity. The process of idealization therefore only captures a certain form of essentialism—the essentialization of value—but does not concern the essence of being.

Constructivism—Truthfulness and Illusoriness

The relational character of values—the relation of the subject of evaluation to the objective being and the relation of exchange as the estimation of two beings and their values—finds, as is well known, a certain finality in money as the value of value: as a measure of values in the process of their transition and exchange in social and economical life (cf. Simmel 2004, e.g., part *The development of the purely symbolic character of money* and chapter *Money in the Sequence of Purposes*). Georg Simmel assumes that this relation is not relativistic, through the processes of idealization (among other means), but the process of idealization is at the same time a process of construction within the frame of accepted and postulated symbolic conventions: “The abstract philosophical construction of a system maintains such a distance from the individual phenomena, especially from practical existence, that actually, at first sight, it only postulates their salvation from isolation and lack of spirituality, even from repulsiveness” (Simmel 2004: 53). However, Simmel emphasizes the subjective, individual character of this construction and so, for example, according to him, changes in the “accentuation of values” are the consequence of the distance between the consumer and the cause of consumption. Expressing needs in a more subtle and particular way forces consciousness to be more devoted to the object, to establish a subjective relation with the individual, particular object of needs and their satisfaction. The individual and intersubjective “accentuation of values” enables their graduation, but this emphasizing process initiates the normative graduation not so much of truth but rather of realizable truthfulness. Contrarily, the intersubjective and objectifying process of idealization deals with truth as a formal and prescriptive ideal.

The world of values, which hovers above the real world apparently unconnected yet without question governing it, would be represented in its ‘pure form’ by money. And just as Plato interprets the real world, from the observation and sublimation of which the ideas have arisen, as a mere reflection of these ideas, so then do the economic relations, stages and fluctuations of concrete things appear as derivatives from their own derivative, namely as representatives and shadows of the significance that their money equivalent possesses (Simmel 2004: 156).

In going beyond the cognitive theses toward assumptions of the subject’s emotionality, Simmel weakens the essentialist assumptions—he turns rather toward the standpoint of David Hume, who criticized substantialist essentialism and considered the position to be an inadequate answer to the anxieties of skepticism. Simmel thus leans toward temporary truthfulness, which sends truth toward an unreachable horizon of future answers and probable findings (probabilism). At the same time, it is a turn toward the relativistically and temporarily considered illusoriness of cognitive and axiological findings, which—as contractual findings, in accordance with the accepted conventions in a given context—escape the essentialist dialectic of truth and illusion. “The two categories of our reflection [its process and its content, resp., an event of consciousness and its content—M.G.] are divided into these two forms, which make knowledge illusory in particular cases but possible in general. Knowledge follows a course of infinite regress, of infinite continuity, of bound-

lessness, which yet is limited at any particular moment” (Simmel 2004: 113). In this way, the essentialist dialectic of truth and illusion is replaced by the constructivist dialectic of truthfulness and illusoriness. The illusoriness is linked with the temporariness of the findings, and their uncertainty may entail doubts. At the same time, temporariness is calming, because the valuation to date can be supplemented with another, more adequate valuation. And so the dialectic of truth and illusion, concerning being and its orders, is replaced with a dialectic adequate to the situation of truthfulness and illusoriness of the conditions of evaluation.

Conclusion—Anthropological Essentialism?

As I have mentioned, Georg Simmel assumes that there are differences in the emphasis of value, which can be distinguished as subjective and objective (e.g., Simmel 2004: 66), and that their source can mistakenly be sought in the autonomous subject or in the object, instead of indicating the primary intentional relation (of desires and needs). However, such a relation has its source in the subject, so Simmel accepts the assumption (perhaps following Kant or neo-Kantianism) that human beings have some necessary rational equipment disposing them to create and establish values. It is thus a constructivist position with a strong essentialist basis—a position that assumes the irrevocability of the anthropological equipment: it pre-conditions, unlike in Kant’s thinking, not so much the cognitive processes leading to the conclusion of the truth about reality but the preceding processes of the evaluative reference to being. These are regulatory processes, which have their sources in the subjective need for rules, order, and hierarchization, realized through idealizations. Simmel referred to the pragmatic concept of truth; however, it was not the goals of his theory that were pragmatic but the assumptions concerning an anthropological adjustment to the changing conditions of life and, at the same time, a constant human disposition to seek normativity, to determine it, and legitimize it through idealization. The aim of his concept was to establish regularity in the pursuit of truth, in appointing truth in accordance with the given state of the world and knowledge, as well as in the rules of maintaining truth and its transformations. According to Simmel, the truth is made to the measure of our needs; however, we need the truth, and it is this mutual entanglement of our eternal needs, the current state of the world, and the related current goals that is summarized in the ontological, epistemological, and methodological standpoint of “constructed essentialism” found in his theses.

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