Lionel Lewkow

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On Georg Simmel's Einleitung in die Moralwissenschaft: Preliminary Methods, Problems, and Concepts for a Critique of Modern Monetary Economics

Abstract. *The aim of this article is to expose some threads of continuity between Philosophie des Geldes and a less explored writing of Georg Simmel's theoretical trajectory, namely: Einleitung in die Moralwissenschaft. To this end, I argue that in this early text Simmel proposes a psychological, sociological, and historical method to examine morality issues, which he later replicates in his approach regarding modern monetary economics. At the same time, I state that both works share resemblances in terms of the exposed topics: The opus magnum of 1900, like that early writing, gives great relevance to ethical issues. On this basis, I evidence the methodological affinity between these texts by comparing the Berliner's treatment of moral duty, on the one hand, and economic value, on the other. Having done this, I explain how the thesis on the conflict of values delineated by young Simmel is then revisited in Philosophie des Geldes to account for the tension between economic value and the value of people.*

Introduction

> Who can be interested any longer in that age-old idle talk about good and evil when it has been established that good and evil are not 'constants' at all, but 'functional values', so that the goodness of works depends on the historical circumstances[…]?
>
> Robert Musil, *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*

To a large extent, Simmel's early writings constitute unknown terrain within the circles of scholars devoted to his work. Together

with *Über sociale Differenzierung*[1] (On Social Differentiation) (Simmel, 1989a [1890]), his first sociological book, the Berliner composed a monumental writing on Ethics at the end of the 19th century, namely: *Einleitung in die Moralwissenschaft* (Introduction to Moral Science) (Simmel, 1989b [1892]; 1991 [1893], hereinafter *EMW*), a text published in two vast volumes that, briefly describing it, attempts to empirically dissect concepts that moral philosophy, first and foremost Immanuel Kant's, had metaphysically approached.

In this regard, in his reconstruction of the path that Simmel follows towards his late vitalism, Vladimir Jankélévitch (2007[1925]) sees *EMW* as a starting point: Here Simmel dynamizes the forms of practical reason, which transcendental idealism substantialized, by evidencing the ways in which the historically and socially configured moral contents react to them. According to the mentioned exegete, «the criticism of moral dogmatism (...) led Georg Simmel to a philosophy of pure life» (*ibid*.: 41),[2] that is, to a philosophy that gave rise to a new absolute: Life as a fluctuating, indomitable, and ever-evolving entity. On the other hand, in *Der Junge Simmel* (The Young Simmel), certainly the only comprehensive research that is currently available about this period of the intellectual trajectory of the German classic, Klaus Christian Köhnke (1996: 167) indicates that *EMW* should be considered as a «program» and a «field of experimentation» for later works, among others, *Philosophie des Geldes* (The Philosophy of Money) (Simmel, 1989c [1900], hereinafter *PhdG*). Thus, for instance, he points out that in the early writing one can find «the concept of the autonomization of the means against the ends and that of the condensation (*Verdichtung*) of contents that become stable forms» (Köhnke, 1996: 168), a perspective that is later broadly developed in *PhdG*. But even though Köhnke offers an extremely rich and

[1] According to the German grammar of the time when Simmel published this work, I shall apply the spelling «*social*» instead of «*sozial*». I shall do the same with his other early texts.

[2] Every transalation from German or Spanish into English has been done by the author.

thorough research on Simmel's beginnings, he does not show in detail how *EMW* is linked to better-known works, rather, he provides certain hints to continue investigating the subject.

In this line, a different interpretation of Simmel's early reflections on morality is that proposed by Mónica Martinelli (2002), when examining the connection between *EMW* and the posthumous essay entitled «Über Freiheit» (On Freedom) (Simmel, 2004 [1922]). Based on the guiding thread of the topic of freedom, Martinelli hence shows the complementation between the beginning and the end of Simmel's theoretical legacy.

Finally, Uwe Krähnke (2018: 641), in his review of *EMW* recently written for *Simmel-Handbuch* (Simmel Handbook) (Müller and Reitz, 2018) in commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the death of the Berliner theorist, confirms that this early text «is part of the writings that have received less attention out of Simmel's work». Nonetheless, Krähnke briefly exposes how some notions that are relevant to the author's sociology and philosophy are also present in *EMW*. He observes, for instance, that the idea of individuality as a «crossing of social circles», developed by Simmel in *Soziologie* (Simmel, 1992 [1908]: 456-511) and earlier in *Über sociale Differenzierung* (Simmel, 1989a [1890]: 237 -257), is «introduced as topic (in *EMW*) in relation to its effects on moral action» (Krähnke, *ibid.*). However, this review also entails only fragmentary indications of the link between this early text and other writings of the author.

Considering that after more than a century since its publication, *EMW* still partially constitutes an unexplored field -in fact, because of the numerous objections addressed to his moral skepticism, Simmel has considered this work as a «philosophical sin of youth» (Krähnke, 2018: 641)-, the purpose of this article shall be to show some threads of continuity between this early work and *PhdG*, a book that in contrast to *EMW*, the author has regarded as one of the most significant ones of his trajectory (Simmel, 2016a [1916]; 2016b [1918]).

Within this framework, I shall argue that there is a thematic and methodological proximity between both texts. Specifically, *PhdG* evidences Simmel's uninterrupted interest in ethical issues, interest of which *EMW* is testimony in turn. Moreover, the diagnosis of modern monetary economics that is condensed in the work of 1900 recovers and develops central lines of the scientific approach to morality that the sociologist earlier sketches. Consequently, this articles aims to dismantle the difference between a «philosophical» approach to money and a «scientific» approach to morality (1). In this regard, I herein suggest that this methodological affinity becomes manifest in the author's treatment of economic value at the beginning of *PhdG*, indeed entailing a perspective that resembles that formulated almost a decade before in *EMW* to unravel the topic of moral duty (2). Furthermore, in this context I assert that in the last chapter of this early work, Simmel hints at some central pillars of the diagnosis of Modernity that he proposes in *PhdG*, specifically, the tension between values in conflict (3). Finally, the conclusion provides a synthesis of the elaborated analysis.

Early experimentations on object and method of Philosophie des Geldes

When comparing the writings herein examined, two contrasts become primarily obvious: On the one hand, the object of one and the other seems to be different. Whereas one case focuses on morality, the other one devotes to monetary currency. On the other hand, both approaches would be heterogeneous: Young Simmel displays a «scientific» view of morality, while he later proposes a «philosophical» perspective of money.

Even under these circumstances, a thorough reading of *PhdG* allows us to question these alleged discrepancies. Regarding the former, the close relation of Simmel's approach with Aesthetics has been generally emphasized, however, his intellectual output and, even more, his teaching career, are also evidence of a strong concern for questions regarding morality. Between 1885 and 1914, at the University of Berlin, and between 1914 and 1918, at the University

of Strasbourg, Simmel offered 33 seminars on Ethics and only 11 on Aesthetics (in this regard, *cf.* Simmel, 2016c: 607-624). In turn, his late reflections on «individual law» are well-known (Simmel, 1999 [1918]: 346-425), however the German classic had initially written about moral issues. Not only *EMW* is a manifestation of this orientation of his thinking, but also, for example, the essay «Bemerkungen zu socialethischen Problemen» (Considerations on Ethical-Social Problems) (Simmel, 1989d [1888]: 20-36), as well as the second chapter of *Über sociale Differenzierung*, where Simmel examines the problem of «collective responsibility» (Simmel, 1989a [1890]: 139-168).

In effect, in the «Preface» of *PhdG* (Simmel, 1989c [1900]: 12), the sociologist compares the way art proceeds with his approach to money. From an aesthetic perspective, a particular condition has a general connotation, *e.g.*, a portrait represents an era, an artistic trend, and so on. In the same way, Simmel seeks to highlight widespread modern trends by shedding light on a singular fragment of social life, that is, the monetary currency. As Simmel (2016a [1916]: 16) points out when briefly assessing his theoretical trajectory, with *PhdG* he sought «to deploy the totality of the interior and exterior cultural development by means of the development of a singular cultural element».

In this regard, David Frisby (2013: 13) argues that Simmel outlines an «aesthetic approach» to money. And this interpretation is reinforced if one takes into account that in this work the author resorts to numerous aesthetic figures in order to interpret modern social relations that are monetarily mediated. Just to mention a few examples, in the last chapter of *PhdG* he uses the notions of «tempo» –concept usually related to musical performance– and «rhythm» –concept usually used in the field of dance, poetry, and music- to account for the modern «lifestyle».

However, this finding does not out rule the relevance of moral issues in this work, above all, the relevance of the topic of freedom, a central theme of the book, which is addressed by Simmel not only in the fourth chapter of the text, but also in a significant portion of

the fifth. This concept is so essential in the text that in the «Selbstanzeige» (Author's Announcement) (Simmel, 1989e [1901]: 719-723) that the sociologist wrote shortly after publishing *PhdG*, entailing a brief text to promote his book, out of the multiple topics on which he reflected along the pages of *PhdG*, he chose to develop the topic of freedom. Therefore, as in his youth, in this *opus magnum* Simmel examines issues of morality, although particularly dealing with how they were influenced by the spread of monetary economics. Hence, it also entails an empirical point of view on morality that is similar to that of his early writing: Freedom is not an absolute, but a concept that acquires different colors according to the historical and social transformations of the economy. Likewise, the fact that the two texts coincide around issues of Ethics should not be a surprise, since shortly before publishing the first of these works, Simmel was working in parallel on some of the nodal ideas of his economic perspective. The conference entitled «Zur Psychologie des Geldes» (On the Psychology of Money) (Simmel, 1989f [1890]), which he delivered at the seminary of Gustav Schmoller (2003 [1901]), highlights this convergence. This affinity between *EMW* and *PhdG* in reference to the issue of the modern conflict of values shall be later resumed.

Having stated the above, whereas in his early writing Simmel sketches a «scientific» approach, in 1900 he elaborates a «philosophical» approach; however, are these approaches heterogeneous? At first glance, again, this seems to be the case.

In effect, in the «Preface to the First Edition» of *EMW*, Simmel (1989b [1892]: 10-11) explains in which direction he will develop his «moral science» and points out that those concepts which Ethics has habitually addressed speculatively, that is, regardless of any empirical condition, shall be approached in his work in psychological, sociological, and historical terms. In such regard, one can read in these pages that

> On the one hand, as part of psychology and according to its normally proven methods, Ethics has to analyze the acts of will,

> feelings, and individual judgments, the contents of which are valid as moral or immoral. On the other hand, it is a part of social science, in that it represents the forms and contents of the community life (*Gemeinschaftsleben*), which are related as cause or effect with the moral duty of the individual. Finally, Ethics is a part of history, in that, through the two mentioned paths, it has to redirect any given moral representation towards its primitive form, any of its developments towards the historical influences that it encounters (Simmel , 1989b [1892]: 10).

In contrast, in the «Preface» of *PhdG*, Simmel (1989c [1900]: 9-14) proposes an alternative perspective to that of the economic science of the time. Thus, he affirms that «(n)o line of this research is intended in terms of the national economy (*nationalökonomisch*)» (ibid.: 11). But even if he takes distance from the scientific outlook of money, this perspective is similar to the one that he had outlined about morality years earlier: Instead of considering economics as an individual field of research, which is the subject of a scientific discipline, he examines money in the light of its significance for human beings and their relations, taking into account the importance that monetary mediation acquires in Modernity. Therefore, he additionally develops a psychological, sociological, and historical approach. This work specifies the preconditions of modern money exploring, Simmel *dixit*, «non-economic concepts and facts and their effects on non-economic values and contexts» (*ibid.*).

Succinctly, *EMW* and *PhdG* converge around ethical concerns and, under the label of «science» or «philosophy», these works propose similar approaches, which we would call interdisciplinary today: Psychology, sociology, and history are applied to examine pieces of reality from different angles. Henceforth, I shall expose this methodological affinity, contrasting the way in which Simmel analyzes moral duty, in the first text, and economic value, in the second. Thereafter, I shall revisit the issue of morality in light of modern social relations.

Moral duty and economic value as psychosocial phenomena

The reflections on morality that Simmel develops in his youth constitute, as argued by Köhnke (1996: 167), a «program» and a «field of experimentation» for formulations that afterwards acquire further elaboration. Thus, the methodology used to examine the issue of moral duty in the initial chapter of *EMW* is later resumed and expanded by Simmel in his reflection on the economic value, which opens *PhdG*.

In both writings the starting point is identical, namely: The critique of substantialism. In *EMW*, specifically, in the chapter entitled «Das Sollen» (Duty), Simmel begins by criticizing the naive belief in the existence of a principle that inherently bears morality. And in *PhdG* he applies the same approach to economic value. In «Wert und Geld» (Value and Money), the first chapter of this work, he points out that there is no object that, by virtue of its intrinsic properties, is valuable *per se*. Therefore, in both cases, Simmel evidences the psychological and sociological roots of hypostasized phenomena, both in everyday life and in theoretical perspectives. Let us analyze this notion in detail.

In *EMW*, Simmel starts by questioning the apodictic, taken for granted nature of existing moral principles. In order to do this, even though in a large part of this work he critically reviews Kantian transcendentalism, he follows the «Copernican turn» towards the subjectivity undertaken by the philosopher from Königsberg. In *EMW,* moral duty is presented as a psychological concept, which is not closely associated with any particular material and historical imperative. Thus, Simmel (1989b [1892]: 23) argues that when «(we) acknowledge that duty is only a form that the ideal, purely objective content of representation may assume in order to constitute a practical world, it becomes clear that, in advance, we shall not award it any strong internal connection with any content». Simmel expands the Kantian formalism by formulating a loss of every preliminary design, *a priori*, of morality. In this regard, one can read in these pages that «Kant was not right when he deduced from the concept

of duty the form of the categorical imperative, even when extremely general» (*ibid.*). Not even a precept as empty in content as the Kantian moral law is present in this perspective.

Afterwards, having resorted to psychology, Simmel rationally explains how moral doctrines are constituted. In this sense, he suggests that the contents of morality form a network in which one relies on the other: «That we have the duty to do something (...) can only be demonstrated by means of the reconduction to another duty presupposed as certain» (*ibid.*: 25). However, for the author this basis explains the lack of foundation of any regulatory system. This work distils a moral skepticism, as its critics have pointed out, where all known ethical concepts are relativized, without Simmel proposing any guidance for human praxis. In this sense, the he points out that «(e)ach link of a chain (…) explains its duty based on the previous one, and when we reach the one that cannot, in turn, receive its duty form another link, it can no longer derive its dignity from another link, there the series is broken, and this link is as unexplained as the first: The ultimate element we can explain is the one before last» (*ibid.*: 27). The lack of a definitive and unquestionable principle, which supports the entire moral building composing the social reality in which the individual is inserted, as shall be later explained, gives rise to the modern conflict of values.

Now, if morality lacks a solid foundation, how shall we explain the power of its imperatives over individuals? Precisely, Simmel resorts to sociological arguments at this point. The force of moral prescriptions, with an objectivity that transcends people, is nothing more than that exerted by the social group over its members. Therefore, Simmel argues that «based on the social character of duty and the infinite threads that converge in it, the dark and strong feeling that accompanies (moral duty) is explained» (*ibid.*: 31). Consistent with the empirical point of view adopted by the author, he considers that only forgetting the social roots of morality may originate a metaphysical ethical perspective like Kant's, given he observes that there are «infinite sources flowing in social groups which affect the individual through inheritance, tradition, and

example, forming, shaking, and exalting it. But vulgar consciousness does not follow these processes to their true source (…) but satisfies its need for causes by means of the invention of a transcendent force that causes them» (*ibid.*). Therefore, there are no eternal and unquestionable moral imperatives according to Simmel's perspective, a situation that, as evidenced by the epigraph of this article, is literarily portrayed by Robert Musil (1965 [1930), an attentive reader of *EMW* (Köhnke, 1996: 239-240), in *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* (The Man Without Qualities): Rather than structures of «constant values», moral doctrines are networks of «functional values», that is, social, relative, historical, valid until further notice.

Going now to *PhdG*, the beginning of this work, as I have suggested earlier, is similar to that of *EMW*. In the same way Simmel in this early writing begins by clarifying a nodal category of Ethics, that is, moral duty, he starts his text of 1900 by examining a structuring concept of monetary exchange, namely: Economic value. Here the darts are once again directed towards substantialism: There is no object that inherently constitutes an economic value. Neither scarcity, nor utility, that is, aspects of the material world, otherwise explain the economic meaning of things. In order to question the naive belief in value, as with moral duty, Simmel begins by accounting for the psychological basis of economic activity.

Consequently, also in *PhdG*, the starting point is Kant, in other words, the return to subjectivity. Thus, Simmel (1989c [1900]: 15) refers to the concept of value as a «psychological fact» (*psychologische Tatsache*). In this sense, when an object is desired by someone –when people have to overcome certain resistance, obstacles, difficulties, in short, make a «sacrifice» (*Opfer*) to obtain something; so that it is presented as a distant entity- it acquires the nuance of value. Indeed, as in *EMW*, the sociologist relates this approach to transcendental idealism. Thus, he points out that «(a)s Kant says, the possibility of experience is the possibility of the objects of experience (…). Also in this way, the possibility of desire is the possibility of objects of

desire» (*ibid*.: 50). In short: Without a desiring subject there are no valuable objects.

Even so, for any given entity to become an economic value, it is not enough for it to be longed for by an isolated individual. Hence, the comparison between Simmel's economic theory and that of marginal utility is not correct (*cf*. in this regard, Frisby, 1993: 161). Economic value, similarly to the moral character of any imperative, can only be explained from a relational point of view. Upon entering the exchange, goods compose a network where the value of one is the result of its comparison with others. Furthermore, just as moral duty, with its dominance over people, is the effect of collective life, the objectivity of economic value, on the other hand, is a consequence of social ties. Incidentally, it is worth referring to *Mehr! Philosophie des Geldes* (More! The Philosophy of Money), a recently published work where Christoph Türke concisely shows the modality of this connection between the psychological origin of value and its objectification by virtue of social relations. In the terms of this interpreter,

> To value, according to Simmel, is primarily something completely subjective: «A feeling», nothing more than that. But one who feels a value, also intends it to be real. (…) Then, value cannot remain a subjective impression, it needs to become objective and nowhere is this better achieved than in exchange. The subjective feeling of value is herein proven; it has to match that of the exchange partner. The larger the number of exchange partners, the greater the objectification (Türcke, 2015: 13).

Concisely, although the source of every economic value is the subjective desire of a subject, the objectivity that characterizes it is a product of intersubjective bonds. In this regard, within this section I have shown the methodological proximity between *EMW* and *PhdG*, but I have not yet explained how history intervenes in the perspective of these writings, since it is important to emphasize that, to a large extent, throughout his theoretical output, Simmel's efforts have been oriented towards proposing a diagnosis of Modernity. At

the same time, I have argued above that *PhdG* is a work where ethical concerns play a central role. Therefore I shall next explain how Simmel's thesis proposed in *EMW* on the modern multiplicity of valuation points of view is resumed years later in *PhdG*.

The Axiological Frictions of Modernity

One of the elements that is part of the description of Modernity that Simmel develops in *PhdG* is the antagonism between the economic value and the value of people, a topic that constitutes the axis of the fifth chapter of this text. When equating an individual to an amount of money, it is precisely the human condition which is at stake. As is evident, it is an ethical concern, since, whereas Kant pointed out that people constitute an «end in itself» and not a mere «means», in other words, they have «dignity» and not «price», Simmel seeks to prove that this contrast is not ontological, but historical, that is, specifically modern. And the fact that in these times we are witnessing a conflict between values, a perspective that is at the core of the reflections that the author proposes in these paragraphs of *PhdG*, is already suggested at the end of *EMW*. Therefore, I shall now show how the two texts are related in this field.

Starting with *EMW*, in the seventh and final chapter of this work, entitled «Einheit und Widerstreit der Zwecke» [Unity and Conflict of Ends], as a result of Simmel's criticism of the possibility of finding a definitive and unquestionable basis for moral standards, criticism that I have mentioned above, the panorama presented is that of an axiological pluralism or relativism. In fact, the theoretical yield of an approach to Modernity that can be drawn from this discussion about the concept of duty can only be glimpsed in this part of the text. Thus, we read the following passage in *EMW*:

> That the innumerable contents of duty, arising from the most diverse historical situations, would possess a latent unity, which one would only have to discover in order to reconcile all its contrasting and contradictory antagonisms, is one of the naive

> metaphysical assumptions of the current Ethics in which it shows an affinity with religion (Simmel, 1991 [1893]: 372).

It derives from dismantling a speculative moral philosophy, of apodictic, transcendent, universal, sacred principles, which constitutes a secular vestige of religion, therefore, that modern society lacks, in Simmel's view, a solid regulatory structure that integrates it: Modern people face a tangle of values that pulls us in one direction or another; entailing a bewilderment, a perplexity, a confusion that is typical of our time. It is possible to know about the perspective that Simmel develops in this fragment of *EMW*, at least partially, through *Über sociale Differenzierung* and the «große Soziologie» (Great Sociology), where he devotes some considerations to the issue of the genesis of individuality on the basis of the «crossing of circles» (Simmel, 1989a [1890]: 237-257; 1992 [1908]: 456-511).

Likewise, in *EMW* the sociologist sustains that the modern individuality, defined by uniqueness and self-determination, is the result of the social relations that cross it: Each person is at the «intersection point» (*Schnittpunkt*) (Simmel, 1991 [1893]: 354) of a large number of heterogeneous groups of which they are part. Even so, the emphasis of *EMW* is placed not so much on the process of individualization, but rather on the moral dilemmas that this position between groups entails for people.

It is worth mentioning that, as regards to the topic of the «crossing of circles», the interpreters (*e.g.*, Schimank, 1996: 44-53; Bongaerts, 2008: 239-302), paying little attention to *EMW*, have examined the problem of individuality above all, though not as much the moral dimension of multiple memberships. This is an approach that, in turn, is previous to the one outlined by Max Weber (2002 [1920]) in his well-known *Zwischenbetrachtung* (Intermediate Consideration) on the conflict between the «spheres of value», and also to the one most recently proposed by Zygmunt Bauman (2009 [1993]) about a «postmodern moral crisis» that lies in the normative pluralism, among other things. As in these

approaches, social life is portrayed by Simmel as a heterarchical cosmos, where different value schemes collide, without an integrative and guiding moral core.

Of course, I shall not herein comprehensively present these Simmelian reflections, and neither shall I analyze their links with other theoretical perspectives, which shall remain for other investigations. In this case, the interest lies in accounting for some guidelines of the analysis of *EMW* that allow us to enrich our understanding of the perspective developed in *PhdG* on the contrast between the economic value and the value of people.

Within this framework, it should be primarily noted that, according to Simmel, it is precisely the «ethical monism» (*ethischer Monismus*) -that is, the search for a unitary and superior moral principle- which triggers the conflicts of values. Although this phenomenon is treated in *EMW* from different angles, exposing opposite variants for the same problem, as usually occurs with the author's perspectivism, it is important to note that, if different moral obligations coexist in harmony and one of them acquires greater importance than the rest, there arises a friction between moralities. As an example, Simmel mentions the antagonism that arose in the fourth century between religious and matrimonial duties with the imposition of celibacy on the Catholic clergy. Thus, one can read in *EMW* that «(a)s soon as the church addressed (the clergy) with the requirement of all or nothing, religious obligations had to enter in an insurmountable conflict with those of marriage» (Simmel, 1991 [1893]: 350). Therefore, when the guiding values of a social sphere acquire greater relevance than those of other social environments, axiological tensions arise.

Second, Simmel argues that the conflict has an inevitable character, it is not simply an individual experience. In this sense, long before elaborating his approach on the «tragedy of culture» (Simmel, 1996 [1911]: 385-416), in *EMW* the author refers to a «tragic conflict» between moral norms. The tension between various perspectives about good and evil is not related with the circumstantial dilemmas of a person, but with the contrasting

interests between heterogeneous groups. Therefore, borrowing theoretical resources from literature, Simmel (1991 [1893]: 356) asserts that «it is precisely in the fact that the antagonisms survive the death of the hero that I find the truly tragic nature of tragedy». In short: The value frictions of Modernity are insoluble, they transcend any person who embodies them.

Having established these assertions, it is possible to examine how this perspective that Simmel delineates at an early phase is implicitly resumed in *PhdG*, since this writing has no direct references to *EMW*, which he himself had deemed a «philosophical sin of youth».

In this regard, in the fifth chapter of the book published in 1900, which is called «Das Geldäquivalent personaler Werte» (The Monetary Equivalent of Personal Values), Simmel describes an axiological friction, although no longer between a plurality of moral schemes. In fact, the antagonism is simplified in *PhdG*. It becomes a dualism: Economic value is at the antipodes of human value. Money is a means of impersonal exchange that lacks «character» and «color», Simmel sustains in *PhdG*, while each human being is unique and unrepeatable. If, as with bribery and prostitution, issues on which the author reflects on in this context, that which is mere quantity -the economic currency- is equated with that which is mere quality -the individual- the result is the degradation of people to a mere «means».

As Kant suggested, the human being has «dignity» and not «price», it is an «end in itself» and not a «mere means». Even so, for Simmel this tension is not metaphysical, but modern. And the argument proposed by the sociologist to explain this difference between human beings and money is similar to the perspective he had proposed in *EMW* years earlier to account for the modern conflict of values. In his early text he points out that the tension between norms arises when the imperatives of a social sphere become more relevant than those of others, while in *PhdG* he affirms that, in Modernity, money acquires an unprecedented significance, to the point that, as the author shows in the third

chapter of this work, which is entitled «Das Geld in den Zweckreihen» (Money in the Teleological Series), in a secularized and earthly Modernity, money takes the place of God. It is within this context that the meaning of human beings is strained to extremes against the meaning of economic value. Thus, if for the religious *Weltanschauung*, God is the unifying vertex of worldly heterogeneity, in other words, the *coincidentia oppositorum*, notion that Simmel finds in Nicholas of Cusa, modern money is similar to this transcendent power. According to *PhdG*, therefore,

> To the extent that money increasingly becomes an expression and an absolute and sufficient equivalent for all values, it rises at an abstract height above the utterly wide multiplicity of objects, it becomes the center in which the most opposite, strange, and distant elements find their community and contact (Simmel, 1989c [1900]: 305).

Hence, it is only in a monetary economy developed up to its final consequences, where money acquires theological qualities becoming the quintessence of social relations, entailing a point of contact between distant objects that are reciprocally, entirely unrelated, but that become equivalent because of monetary mediation, that economic value clashes with the value of people. Succinctly, under these circumstances, money as an abstract, impersonal entity, a pure calculation tool, is at the antipodes of the exceptional, qualitatively determined nuances that, on the other hand, the human being acquires in Modernity.

Together with the simplification and reduction to duality -money vs. people- of a conflict that opposes a multiplicity of values in *EMW*, it may be added that the axiological friction that *PhdG* focuses on does not have the same severity than the value differences that Simmel had theorized in his youth. The dialectic between quantity and quality, which we find in these pages of the text that the author published at the turn of the century, causes the tension between the currency and human beings, however, to open up to vanishing points, escape routes. Thus, for example, when the

amount of money offered to a person as a bribe is quite abundant, it ceases to be so unworthy to the public eye: «(T)he robbery or scam for small amounts, according to the dominant social moral, is so much more despicable than the theft of the great (...)», in other words, «(...) the bribe -the sale of duty or conviction- is all the more infamous the smaller the sum for which it is done», dictates Simmel (1989c [1900]: 526).

Conclusions

Throughout the foregoing sections, I have shown how EMW, the most extensive writing that Simmel composed in his youth, and also the most voluminous work of his legacy, despite having received little attention in the circles of researchers dedicated to his theory, left an undeniable imprint in PhdG, text where the author develops his perspective of Modernity in a detailed and comprehensive manner.

In this regard, I have pointed out that, even though this early writing proposes a «moral science» and that of 1900 a «philosophy of money», in both cases the approach is similar: Reality is explained from a psychological, sociological, and historical point of view. In this context, I have argued that, although the Simmelian perspective is usually associated with Aesthetics, both works demonstrate the strong interest of this sociologist in the issues concerning Ethics.

At a later stage, I have explained how the same methodology is used by the author to dismantle substantialist perspectives, both of moral duty and of economic value. In this sense, the two topics are first examined in their psychological dimension, and then analyzed from a relational point of view: Moral imperatives, like economic values, make up a network that constitutes them. On the other hand, the objectivity of the norms, as well as that of monetary value, as evidenced in this article, is a product of social life according to Simmel.

Finally, I have herein shown that the German theorist does not seek to dissect morality and money as abstract concepts but rather

in historical terms, that is, in their modern significance. Therefore, in EMW and in PhdG he indicates that in our era we face an axiological conflict. Nonetheless, while in the early text he shows a tension between a plurality of values, which Simmel qualifies as «tragic», that is, insoluble, always open, and inevitable, in his diagnosis of advanced monetary economics, on the one hand, he narrows down this antagonism to the opposition between two parties, money against humans, and, on the other, he softens it by resorting to a dialectic between quantity and quality: For current morality -even at the beginning of the second decade of the 21st century, I may add- receiving large amounts of money in exchange for personal values seems not to be as degrading as receiving a few cents.

In sum, this article should be considered as an invitation to take into account this forgotten part of the Simmelian output, where we can still find theoretical resources to understand both its intellectual course as well as the time in which we still live, which, in its neoliberal version, is overall increasingly defined by a primacy of money and a normative relativism.

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