

## The Philosophy of Max Scheler

### The Beginning of the Phenomenology

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1. Scheler as Phenomenologist. 2. Philosophy of values.—3. The structure of feelings.—4. Comparison with Kantianism.—5. The ideal factor—factor of reality.—6. Scheler as Sociologist.

Scheler as a Phenomenologist.—Max Scheler (1874-1928) continued and enriched the phenomenological method by applying it to the humanities, ethics, the philosophy of religion and sociology. Like Husserl, he was an opponent of psychologism and rejected the limitation of knowledge to positivistic or nominalistic principles. He was not hostile to metaphysics, as were his Neo-Kantian contemporaries, he went beyond Husserl's pure analysis of consciousness and sought the unchangeable element in the changing temporal moment.

In Germany, Scheler exercised an extraordinary influence through, first of all, his close-to-life analysis of the emotional factor in all human conduct and, secondly, through his deep insights into the realm of qualitative values. Even though he did not establish a system, properly speaking, the effects of the new problems which he brought to light have been indeed lasting. Just as with Dilthey, Scheler cannot be thought away from German intellectual history.

Like the other phenomenologists, Scheler also follows the call "Back to the thing," investigating not only the possibility, the "how" of cognition, but more specifically the "what" of that which is given in cognition. Disclaiming a reduction of philosophy to a handmaid of the empirical natural sciences, he also endeavors to go above and beyond abstract logical knowledge. His goal is to explicate univocal fundamental principles for a philosophical science of essence eventually leading into metaphysics. This

in turn opens the way to a philosophical *Hinführung zur Religion*, "leading towards religion." According to Scheler the problem of religion can never be conclusively answered through mere subjective inner experience or subjectivization of the holy, such as Rudolf Otto attempted.

The goal of philosophy for Scheler is not the subjective *act* of understanding but the objectively evinced *contents* which present themselves in the act of understanding. These contents disclose themselves in man's intellectual and spiritual life. The apprehension of *essential* contents, in contrast to mere *factual* contents, assigns man a special position in the animal kingdom ; and while enabling him to transcend mere vital urges, it gives him the possibility of saying "No" to these urges. In this respect Scheler describes acts of ideation which can, in a special way, lead to insights into value. Such acts are essentially different from the mere activity of intelligence, the beginnings of which are already observable in the animals. The spiritmind, for Scheler, spiritualizes and sublimates the animal urges and ideates life even though it derives its impetus from these vital spheres which are the most powerful forces available to it. Geist, spiritmind "is all that which possesses the essential contents of act, intentionality and meaning fulfillment", and it realizes its concretion in the human person.

Ultimately Scheler springs the old question, which was later taken up by Heidegger : "Why, after all, does something and not nothing exist ?" This is a renovation of the problem of the meaning the *Sinn* of existence. Ultimately, therefore, the problem of God, becomes pertinent. There Scheler goes beyond the Kantian limits of factual, sensory experience. Indeed, he is even prepared to advance to an immediate experience of God, an activity which is possible, he says, only to the few, who then communicate to others and report the contents of their inner experiences.

It has been quite rightly observed that Scheler's philosophy approximates the perceptual-intuitive method of Augustine and that it thus eschews the empirical method of the natural sciences. This is especially evident in Scheler's book *Vom Ewigen im Menschen* (1921). And instead of attempting to prove the existence of God by means of rational argument, Scheler takes the position

that an immediate insight into the essence of the *phenomenon of the divine* is spiritually possible. Such a method, the intuition of the qualities of the divine essence, thus exceeds the limits of analytic reason and leads not to a "proof of God" (*Gottesbeweis*), but to an "indication of God" (*Gottesaufweis*) in which the personality, spirituality and holiness of the divine essence are elicited. We thus have not proofs but indices of God.

In his later period Scheler's thought underwent a certain transformation and his theistic convictions were replaced by a more pantheistic conception of the world, which, however, he did not explain in detail. He then took up something frequently expressed in German thought: the notion of a sphere of the divine immanent within the world. The temporal task of man is to liberate, through acts of love, the world-immanent divine being from its own negative impulses. According to such a scheme man becomes virtually the self-realization of God, the "precinct of the emergence of God". Scheler briefly sets forth this conception in *Die Stellung des Menschen im Kosmos* (1928). Such notions are reminiscent of the mystic Jacob Boehme (+1624) and even to a certain degree of Meister Eckehardt (+1327) but most of all of Eduard von Hartmann (+1906), the philosopher of the unconscious.

Like Husserl, Scheler was concerned with an apriori that could never be overthrown by individual facts. His "aprioric certainty (Evident)" this recalls Franz Brentano—is itself a particular manner of intentionality wherein the veridical content discloses itself. But even Scheler has to admit a description of certainty which lies in a faulty analysis of the facts constituting the certainty this can easily occur in the fate of metaphysical problems. Everything thus depends upon the correct execution of a genuine and true phenomenological elucidation of essence. Even though initially we attain only preliminary, inadequate truths, we should be content with them, for they are nevertheless a degree of truth, even if we cannot uncover their ultimate secrets. The analysis proceeds in the correct way when we always abide by the "thing itself" and when we do not arbitrarily construe the evidence.

## 2. Philosophy of Values :—

In *Der Formalismus in der Ethik und die materiale Wertethik* (1913), Scheler expounds his theory of a “material” ethics of value as against a formalistic ethics of imperatives which lack specific qualitative inner contents. He marshals his analytic phenomenological method in the way as just explained and turns above all against immanuel Kant, whose ethics he contends is based only upon the formalistic principle of the categorical imperative. In opposition to this Scheler proposes his ethics of “material qualities”, which he calls “values”. He also attacks any positivistic attempt to found values in empirical, self-contradictory facts, or of calling values the subjective creations of man. Nor can the sphere of values, as essences, be broken like a “stone tablet” (Gafeen der Werke) as Nietzsche taught when he admonished that “the change of values is the change of the creative ones. . . . . he who would be a creator must always annihilate.” For Scheler, on the contrary, values and “coherences of essences” (*Wesens fusammen Larng*) always exist objectively. We are bound to them, even though our historical knowledge of them may have been only relative.

An integral part of Scheler’s philosophy is his notion of the order of rank of Values. We have an immediate “certainty of priority (*Vorzugsevidenz*) of the higher over the lower values, for example that the spirit is superior to the body and that love is higher than intellectual accomplishment. These judgements, as value contents, are simply given to us as preferred qualities and are disclosable in an aprioric act of what in English one might call “amative” knowing, i.e. a knowing in which the subject is also prepared to love the object. Scheller also calls this the *Apriori der Liebs*, “the apriori of love”. Only a veracious analysis of phenomena is able to express the essential value of any entity. In countless examples Scheler convincingly demonstrated this “analysis of essence.” His aprioric method is not restricted to the formal conditions of knowledge, as with Kant, but refers to objectual or “material” contents as essences which by their very nature are known only in an aprioric manner. Thus he refers to the “material” apriori in distinction

to the "formal" apriori. Husserl had also accepted this kind of aprioric knowledge.

It is also Scheler's conviction that the ethics of the ought (*das Sollen*)—Heinrich Rickert, the Neo-Kantian, also dealt extensively with this—and the so-called prohibital ethics (*Verbotsethik*) by-pass the decisive phenomena of ethical value. According to him values "invite" us to engage in their fulfillment, whereby we are "elevated" to their heights. But they do not command us. Their value-character does not follow from the law, but the law emerges from their value-character. Scheler thus makes his well-known assertion that duty (*Pflicht* in Kant) is only a formalized "substitute for active virtue" (*Gurrogat der Tugarrd*). Naturally one should fulfill one's duty; however, it becomes a formal, hortative obligation when the content of the actually perceived value is not able to win the subject for its actualization. For Scheler the summons to follow a perceived value or good cannot be derived from an unspecified formal exhortation or obligation; it has to proceed from our actual response to a specific value-quality as a "material" and not a formal object. If duty has no specific contents then an appeal to the vacuum of "contentless" formal duty can justify all sorts of evil acts, just as was done in the political atrocities of recent times.

According to Scheler, humankind possesses a faculty of "intentional feeling" which perceives its contents directly. In it a value is "felt" or perceived as an objective spiritual quality immediately given in the act of feeling. This value-datum is presented in the feeling, which is itself not a mere subjective state but an act of feeling something eidetically objectual. The sensuality is based on perception, concepts on thinking, values on feeling. In contrast to rationalism the world of feeling is elevated to the rank of spiritual emotions. No longer do they have only the character of sensual state (*zustandlich*), as they were regarded earlier, but they receive an obstantial (*gegenstandlichen*) character of the same objectivity as we have in logical thinking. In this feeling a spiritual image, a spiritual insight is presented to us, which calls to life a spiritual emotion. This is presented to us in "vision of values" (*Wertschau*). In this "feeling", according to Scheler we can

His conception of remorse is not that it is an inner weakness, as Nietzsche thought, but that as an act of contrition it is an inner renewal attendant upon the "acknowledgement of higher in preference to lower values". It presumes a new beginning, morally and spiritually, which every person can accomplish. Scheler's analyses of the phenomenon of remorse are especially discerning, and the famous psychologist Philip Lersch has adopted them in expounding the endo-thymic basis of life of his work in characterology. The notion that our most decisive actions spring from the inner depths of our affective temperament (Genrids-life) is definitely reminiscent of Plato's theory of the function of the noble part of the soul, the *thymoeides*.

#### 4. Comparison with Kantianism :—

One old and familiar tendency in German philosophy is *not* perpetuated in Scheler's thought : it is the preoccupation with the primacy of the will. The reason is that Scheler, posited the primacy of value, that material quality upon which the will is secondarily dependent. The notion of the primacy of the will had already begun in late mediaeval Philosophy and meets us again today in the Neo-Kantian relation between value and the ought which must summon the will (cf. Heinrich Pickert). For Scheler, however, value has the primacy in this relation because from it arises only secondarily the summons to the moral will to perform a value-invited action. Scheler observed quite rightly that a person cannot be demanded or coerced to act upon the value of love, for example, but that its summons should be followed by the spontaneous and free affirmation of the person who actually perceives the *material* value and not the *formal* requirement thereof. Furthermore, the value itself would lose its proper and specific value-character if it were not acted upon freely and for its own sake, since for Scheler an obligatory love is not the spontaneous love, the value of which he is speaking. According to him, therefore, a person who follows a negative precept of prohibital ethics, (Verbots ethik) such as "Thou shalt not lie", is fulfilling the law but not the value, which can be realized only by assuming the higher positive attitude of truthfulness and veracity. Scheler thus sees the higher value not in not lying, but in telling the truth, and for

him the person's intention is fully ethical or "valuable" only when the entire person freely obeys the call of the positive value inviting the person to actualize it. The value thus seizes upon the inner being and conscience of the person to such a degree that, in his entire behavioral attitude and thus in his inclination to realize a substantial good, he veritably holds himself upon to the advent of the valuable. This is the reverse of Kant's theory that inclination (*Neigung*) which for him is bound to exterior factors and inner affections always stand in opposition to the pure formal ought of duty (*Pflicht*) Scheler's phenomenology thus took upon itself the task of penetrating to the inner realms of the person and of eliciting the nature of the value-ethical process occurring there.

According to Scheler, values present themselves in value-intuition as ideal "material". This presentation in intuition is also called a value-evidence. There are many kinds and ranks of value. Ethical values, such as person values (*Personerte*) including virtues, are to be distinguished from valuable things as goods and thing-values (*Sacherte*) including cultural goods. (*Rulkurgifer*) There are historical epochs when entire Realms of value fall into oblivion, and even in the life of the individual person certain groups of values can be disregarded. But none of the discarded values lose their claim to validity, for they continue to "obtain". They are simply disregarded with in a temporary temporal circumstance having no bearing upon their supratemporal character. For example, aesthetic values obtain or remain valid whether we conform to them or not, and the value of love is fully independent of the fact that in some epochs it is widely disregarded. For Scheler certain periods are in some respects "value-blind", as a matter of fact, every period has its value insights and value blindnesses. This corresponds to the fact that also in the sciences certain truths are periodically unattended or forgotten. The task of philosophy, however, should be to elicit and elucidate as many values as possible and to allow them to pervade the thought and activity of our morals and culture.

Scheler was nonetheless aware, as was the Neokantian Wilhelm Windelband, that the "causal process of things pays no heed to the values

which appear in it". Forces opposed to our values i.e. negative values, value-contrary meet us on all sides every day in our individual existence and in history. This leads Scheler to speak of tragedy, which he says confronts us as a conflict of value and as a destruction of the valuable (cf. W. Windelband——; the vikalist L. Klages——; M. Heidegger.——). Tragedy as such is not a constitutive element in the mechanical laws of nature, but transcends them. Insofar as a tragic event is conditioned by concrete causality, we encounter in it a factual constellation which will never recur exactly the same and which delimits our possibilities and alternatives. So even though tragedy often forces itself upon us, we should not protest the factual constellation knows neither justice nor injustice—but we ought to accept it with magnanimity, for we are faced with the peculiarity of the nature of human historical events or occurrences (cf. Heidegger's *Geschichtlichkeit*, "historicity") and by assuming a negative attitude we can be cast into irreparable misfortune.

##### 5. The ideal factor-factor of reality :—

In his later years Scheler's thought underwent a change, and because he never resumed the questions which he had previously treated (mainly metaphysical questions), it is difficult to arrive at an accurate comparison of the two periods in order to determine just how profound the change actually was. Compared to his former philosophy of spiritmind (*Geist*), he now advocated a theory of natural drives and blind impulses in which he made a basic distinction between "ideal factors" and of "reality". Both factors together compose the total world process, the realm of eternal values and the spiritmind constituting the ideal factor, and the real factor being composed of the "resistence of reality" from which urges and drives spring. Real factors are grounded in impersonal natural instincts such as self-survival, reproduction power, nourishment, and so on. Precisely these activities unite us with reality and are some of the essential determining factors in the occurrences and the life of the human community. Neither should the ideal factors be overlooked. The notion of the "resistence of reality" will appear later in Nicolai Hartmann's foundation of realism, wherein cognition occurs



only in the state of perplexity on external surprise (Betroffen-sein). In many respects the design of Scheler's later philosophy is astonishingly similar to that of his friend Hartmann.

The "ideal factor" of spiritmind forms the contents of culture, but the creative activity and accomplishments out of which culture flows result only when the ideal-spiritual factor unites with the natural drives of the factor "of reality". Scheler holds, as does Nicolai Hartmann, that the spiritmind alone does not have the power and effectiveness to carry out its own ends. This does not mean that the mind is powerless; such would be true only when it is taken abstractly and without a relation to real life. Scheler says, "Though spiritmind is only a determining factor, it is not a realization factor for the becoming of culture." Spiritmind chooses values and posits goals, but it does not do more than to determine means and ends, leaving the realization to other faculties and to the real factors. Culture issues from the combined efforts of both ideal determinative and real actualizational factors. It is thus paramount that ideas and values maintain a close inner relation with the conative strivings and tendencies of our natural appetites and that they pervade our individual and collective interests, impulses and drives.

#### 6. Scheler as Sociologist :—

This manner of observing the complex of human existence (but regarded only in its *essential*, not its existential character) enabled Scheler to develop a most extraordinary phenomenological philosophical sociology greatly contributing to our understanding of the relation between society and the forms of knowledge attainable by man (*Die Wissensformen und die Gesellschaft*, 1926). An original discovery was Scheler's law of the "succession of phases" stating that the fundamental condition of all communal life is the satisfaction of the three instincts of self-survival, reproduction and nourishment. A community lacking these instincts would soon cease to exist; in fact, without them it would not even come into existence. However, the satisfaction of these drives alone does not sufficiently fulfill the specifically *human*

community, for they are only the basic condition for the much richer, possibilities of our spiritual life. Scheler contends that the "forms of all science, thought, contemplation and knowledge "can be shown to have a social character and that they must always be conjoined with perspectives of interest which as Erich Rothacker says, reveal their particular "meaning-character" (Bedeutungscharakter), also for the cultural complex in question.

But cultural phenomena can never be explained by their general social element alone because the other element of individual creative initiative is also an indispensable element of culture. Scheler's sociology, therefore, retains the personalistic aspect of his overall philosophy.

In line with his stratification of values, Scheler observes three basic forms of knowledge. The first is "dominative or achievement knowledge". Its purpose is to investigate the laws of the vital sphere, to control its tendencies and drives, and to exploit the powers of cosmic existence. We are in danger of getting into a state in which we have only this knowledge. It is not independent of valuations, as modern science likes to contend; in this case it would acknowledge only a mechanistic reality resulting in the ideology of historical-dialectical materialism. In this respect Scheler anticipates the problem of the connection between nihilism and technocracy (cf. Albert Camus) which Heidegger raises to central importance when he summarily accuses Occidental rational-objective (gegenständliche) thought of being dominated by it. The hegemony of this kind of knowledge can only be overcome by a higher Bildungswissen "culturing knowledge." This second type of knowledge is concerned with intellectual and spiritual values and is able to intensify and elevate life in that it assumes the grand task of forming and shaping the human personality. But man ought not to rest in this form of knowledge either, for superior to it is *Erlosungswissen*, "the knowledge of salvation". This third and highest form of knowledge has validity insofar as man is granted an ultimate value, the divine primordial ideal which should lend human activity its meaning and orientation.

In Scheler's phenomenology some basically new aspects arise. Philosophy is not a logical aprioric deduction from general truths or axioms,

as with the Neo-Kantians, but an analysis of objectively intuited contents. In a somewhat receptive manner it turned to those qualitative experiences of essence given to us in the fullness of human life; but in seeking the effective reality of human existence in a conjunction of *Bios* and *Logos*, it did not descend to the one-sided vitalism of the philosophy of Ludwig Klages. Intuition, which for Scheler is born by love, for him a genuine analysis of essence, is able to show by spiritual envisionment (*geistiges Leben*) the basic qualities of truly valuable experiences. The particular accomplishment of this method was in showing how the inner spiritual awareness of the mind is intimately connected with the emotional affective value-apprehension. This same inner faculty can perceive intellectual and spiritual truths. In this sense the phenomenology of Scheler is somehow a union between the intellectual claims of the Neo-Kantians and the vitalistic claims of life-philosophy. Hence it becomes a progressive synthesis of the ideal factors of intellectual spiritual contents and the reality factors of the powers of affective, vital experience.

Scheler was an acknowledged master in descriptive analysis of the experiences undergone by the human soul. His descriptions were convincing and true. However, as a phenomenologist he limited himself to analyzing only the general essences obtainable from phenomena and did not concern himself with the singularity of the particular concrete real existent; for as we have seen, the phenomenological method—already Husserl excluded it from its purview simply by “bracketing it in”. This exclusion of existence and preoccupation with essence turned out to be the very fact partly responsible for the reaction which was later called “existentialism”, the movement which in its turn applied the phenomenological method to that which Scheler and Husserl avoided: the quest for *Being*. However, this movement toward “existence” is not primarily concerned with the existence of things or objects, nor with existence or being as such, but with the unfathomable, specifically unique and singular occurrence of *Existenz* which is man himself. For, after all, does not the question of life revolve about this, our individual *Existenz*?



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