MAX SCHELER'S UNDERSTANDING OF THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL METHOD

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The present article is designed to show the close relationship between Max Scheler's metaphysical dualism and his understanding of phenomenology. It is this author's position that Scheler's philosophy as developed in his anthropology, metaphysics, and natural theology was not based on phenomenological insights, but that his understanding of phenomenology was conditioned by his metaphyscial dualism.

1. Scheler's Realistic View of Essences

a. Historical Context

When Scheler became acquainted with the phenomenological method, he had already developed his own basic philosophical conviction, which was of a realistic nature. In Die Deutsche Philosophie der Gegenwart, written in 1922, he himself calls his philosophical position a "volitional realism." Scheler arrived at this position after having rejected the Kantianism of the School of Marburg with its transcendental idealism because, as he saw it, Kant's theory of the ordering function of subjective forms of perception and reasoning ultimately is the expression of a distrust and hostility toward Being, while in fact our fundamental attitude toward Being should be one of trust and loving devotion. Such a trusting attitude toward Being Scheler considers the only right one, because the awareness that the object of our knowledge is independent from the knower, independent in its existence and its essence, is an intrinsic factor of knowing itself. This awareness demands that the knower acknowledge in humility his dependence on Being and dispose himself for the self-revelation of Being. Knowledge, which for Scheler basically is a passive perception of self-revealing Being and its structures, is possible only on the basis of such a trusting and humble openness.

Scheler considers as the most fundamental self-revelations of being the cognition "that something is" or that "it is not the case that nothing is," and that "there is an absolute being" or that "there is a being through which all non-absolute being has its being."

Scheler calls these and similar self-revelations objective self-revelations of Being, because, as he says, he does not start "like Descartes, Locke, Kant and others with 'knowledge,' or 'thought,' or 'consciousness,' or any other mode of subjectivity." In other words, the self-revelations of being he speaks about presuppose the phenomenological reduction in which the existence of the subject—as an existent "thinking thing" or as "transcendental apperception"—is bracketed.

Besides pointing to the conviction which Scheler finds is implicit in all our knowledge, namely that the object of our knowledge is independent of the knower, he rejects Kantian transcendentalism because it presupposes the contention of sensism that the sense-given is nothing but a "chaos" of sensations, or as Kant expresses it, is "raw material of sensible impressions." This contention of sensism, that the primary building stones of our knowledge are mere sense data, unrelated with one another and without any structure, Scheler considers totally unfounded and "a fundamental error." What is primordially "given," according to Scheler, are meaningful essences and essential relations between such essences. And if sensism is wrong, there is no need to assume, as Kant does, that it is the subject who introduces order and structure into the world of "objects" in accordance with the subjective laws of perception and thinking.

Rejecting Kant's premises and with this Kant's theory of subjective forms, Scheler takes the philosophical position of realism, holding that there is a realm of being-in-itself, which is absolutely independent from consciousness. This being-in-itself, as Scheler speaks of it, is divided into two spheres: the sphere of essences and values on the one hand, and the sphere of "reality" in the strict sense on the other. Since Scheler's conception of phenomenology and of the phenomenological reduction can be fully appreciated only if it is seen in the context of his realistic philosophy, let us have a look at these two spheres of being, beginning with the ontological status which Scheler attributes to essences.

b. Ontological Status of Essences

In "Idealismus" Scheler explicitly rejects the connection between "phenomenological reduction" and an "idealism of absolute consciousness" as Husserl has established it. Scheler says the reduction is:

first of all totally independent from the gnoseological opposition between "realism and idealism".... The residuum of the de-realization of the world indeed is the "ideal" world of essences; but it is not something which at the same time could be called "immanent to consciousness." Husserl's contention that the "immanent essences" precede the "transcendent essences" and that therefore the essential laws of consciousness "of something" are also the laws of the objects of consciousness... is a contention which in no way follows from the method of reduction. It is a gnoseological "position," which follows from the well known statement, pronounced first by Descartes, namely the statement about the original immanence to consciousness of all that is given.²

Scheler rejects the immanence of essences, as described above. Essences are "given," and this implies for him that they are trancendent. He speaks of "essences as autonomous realities," which do not have their origin in the activity of the subject. Essences possess a positive mode of being, and their totality possesses a certain kind of consistency and independence, so that one can speak of a "world" of essences which is not subordinated to the empirical reality or to thought.

Scheler speaks of a "world of essences," consisting of protophenomena and ideas, for which sense perceptions and conceptions of practical reason are only "images," that is, more or less good "exemplars." He refers to such essences as e.g. the essence "life," "physical being," or "color," when he says that phenomenology as a philosophy "uncovers the a priori structures of essences and of ideas, which as objective logos (italics mine) weave through the total world-reality." As we shall see, by the "objective logos" Scheler understands one of the two attributes of the "ground of being."

What needs to be emphasized is that for Scheler the "things" which are given in phenomenological experience are not so much pure "phenomena," mere correlates of intentionality, as they are for Husserl. They are facts that belong to the "absolute being of the world." Thus it is understandable that Scheler at times says that "phenomenology strictly coincides with metaphysics." In phenomenological experience "the *ontological* (italics mine) and value contents of the world reveals itself, and the difference between 'thing in itself and 'appearance' falls away."

The ontological status of essences also can be seen in the fact that the philosopher gains access to the realm of essences only by acts of love. The specific philosophical attitude he describes as an "act, determined by love, by which the innermost core of a finite human person participates in the essences of all possible things." The philosopher's interest, which is motivated by his love, is to "participate in absolute being . . . in being as it is in itself." In order to enable himself to participate in absolute being, the philosopher has to extricate himself from the limitations of bio-physical being, that is, from the life-force itself. This is done by means of the phenomenological reduction.

Before dealing with the phenomenological reduction and Scheler's understanding of "reality" in the strict sense—which is the other element in his realism—let us look at two points of his philosophy which throw further light on the ontological status which he attributes to essences. These two points are: (1) the overcoming by phenomenology of the a priori—a posteriori dilemma and with this of the conflict between traditional empiricism and Kantian transcendentalism; (2) his conception of "phenomenological truth."

c. Phenomenology as a "Radical Empiricism"

Scheler considers phenomenology to be the "most radical empiricism and positivism." The term "radical empiricism" had been applied to phenomenology already by Finch with the approval of Husserl. For Scheler, however, this term expresses that phenomenology is dealing with "absolute facts" and that it thus "strictly coincides with metaphysics."

What is the major difference, then, between traditional empiricism and phenomenology, as Scheler sees it? It consists in the fact—besides that the field of experience is widened beyond the boundaries of "sense-experience—that phenomenological experience is "pure and immediate," while sense experience "is conditioned and mediated by the particular organic structure of the act-

carrier."¹⁰ That is, the sense empiricist posits the bio-psychical body in its concrete structure as the absolute subject of all experiences so that all experiences are relative to, or conditioned by this concrete bio-psychical "organization." The phenomenologist, however, does not accept the bio-psychical nature as the absolute subject of experience, but for him the bio-psychical nature itself still is a "given" to the "pure subject," which is intentionality.

Phenomenological experience accordingly is unconditioned: that is, "the absolute ontological and axiological constituents of the world" reveal themselves in this experience. As such, phenomenological experience is an "a posteriori knowledge" for two reasons: (1) because it is "received" and not the product of a subjective synthesis; and (2) because it implies a reference to contingent facts. In phenomenological experience, although one does not have to have a multiplicity of cases, one nevertheless has to have one concrete case or one contingent fact in order to perceive in it the corresponding essence, "11 as for example a concrete, bic et nunc existent living being in order to intuit the essence of "life," or a particular "red," in order to perceive the essence of "red" or the essence "color."

Phenomenological experience in this way is a posteriori but nevertheless that which is known, the essences, are a priori. They are a priori first because they are before all inductive experience, being gained from one "exemplar"; and secondly, they are a priori because they can be predicated about a multiplicity of cases. For instance, Scheler says, if the essence of "life" is once intuitively grasped, then it applies a priori to all contingent and observable instances of the essence life.¹²

In order to underline Scheler's particular meaning of the a priori let us briefly contrast Scheler's with Kant's view of knowledge so far as the a priori is concerned. For Kant the categories are a priori to all experience, that is, to sense experience, because they are subjective structures of the mind. For Scheler, however, essences such as "life," "physical being," "energy," and so on, are a priori to all sense experience because they are the structures of being and of the different spheres of being and as such are "given" in phenomenological experience. "The unities of form" Scheler says, "which Kant enumerates as examples of his 'categories' and many more, which he does not enumerate, are determinations of the object (italics mine), which belong to the 'given' itself; for example, substance, causality, relations, form etc."13 Kant's conception of the a priori as subjective forms of the mind has, according to Scheler, two unjustified presuppositions: the first is the sensistic dogma, as mentioned before; the second is the positing of the concrete bio-psychical subject-and besides this the mind with its structure - as the ultimate subject. And exactly this is from the phenomenological point of view, as Scheler says, Kant's πρώτον πσεύδος for the phenomenologist claims that we have to go behind the concrete subject to pure intentionality.

As Scheler sees it, the opposition between Kantianism and Empiricism is a false one. It is false because it is wrong to connect the a posteriori with experience

and the a priori with the non-experiential. The phenomenological fact as given in the unconditioned "phenomenological experience" is a priori itself, or expressed differently, the empiricist (and especially the associationist) is wrong when he says that the primary data in consciousness are mere sense data which then are combined and related to meaningful unities by psychological habits and tendencies. But Kant is also wrong when he uncritically accepts the first premise of empiricism, and then understands the meaningful unities as subjective forms which are imposed on what is given. For if nothing is posited (what this specifically means for Scheler we shall see shortly in discussing the phenomenological reduction), what is given first are not individual sense data but different "forms of Dasein" or forms of givenness, as the physical and psychical forms of Dasein. Only on the basis of such phenomenological experiences of forms and essences, he says, is inductive, "observational" experience possible.

By contrast, then, Scheler holds that in the phenomenological attitude the order and meaningful structures of being come to the knower in absolute immediacy.

This immediacy with which the ontic structures are said to reveal themselves in intentionality is further underlined when Scheler speaks of phenomenological truth. The immediacy of the self-revelation of being Scheler conceives in such a way that "truth" actually becomes the identity of the intentional act and the essence. Knowledge, Scheler says, must be understood in ontological terms, namely as participation of the intentional act in its object, which is an essence or ontic structure. Ultimately, then, the truth of phenomenological experience or "Phenomenological truth"—is self-identity.

When speaking of phenomenological truth, Scheler explicitly relates himself to Spinoza, quoting Spinoza that "truth is a criterion of itself and of falsehood." For Spinoza, truth cannot be anything but the identity of the "thing" with itself or of the act of *intellectio* with the "eternal things." This is so because for Spinoza there is only one substantial reality realizing itself in different attributes and modes which ultimately are only aspects of the one substantial being. To have true knowledge, therefore, for Spinoza, means to grasp the essences of the multiplicity of things. For the individual things depend in their being on those "eternal things," that is, the essences. For Spinoza, these "eternal things" belong, like aspects, to the absolute one being; they are identical with acts of knowing. For spirit and nature, "certitude and objective being are one and the same." 14

Scheler would be in agreement with Spinoza's understanding of truth as identity of the act of *intellectio* with "eternal things" as long as by "eternal things" would be meant "essences" as distinct from existence. While for Spinoza, however, "existence belongs to the essence," for Scheler this is not so. Scheler stresses that the most basic characteristic of the knowing spirit is its ability to separate essence from existence. Spirit is directed only to essences. Existence, according to him, is outside of the "object"—sphere of spirit; it is identical with the expression of the primordial *Drang*.

2. Scheler's Understanding of "Reality" in the Strict Sense

a. Scheler's Volitional Realism

If for Scheler "truth consists in the identification of a spiritual act with the correlated essence," or to express the same in different terms: if phenomenologial experience consists in the evidence of the "thing" itself or of a pure essence, the question arises what prerequisites in the subject have to be fulfilled so that the realm of essences opens up to him. The answer to this question lies in Scheler's understanding of the phenomenological reduction.

In order to enable ourselves to grasp the full meaning of Scheler's phenomenological reduction, it is necessary to be aware of his understanding of "reality" and "unreality," since the reduction consists in the bracketing of the reality-aspect itself. In other words, we have to clarify what we called before "the second element" in Scheler's realism. He himself says:

The questions which are concerned with the reality-aspect itself and with the acts that give the reality-aspect, are of decisive importance for the technique of knowing essences (Wesenserkenntnis). . . . For if the reality-aspect is to be removed so that the true essences can reveal themselves, if the "derealization" of the world is to take place which is the necessary condition of the essentialization (Werwesentlicbung), then it must be clear what the reality-aspect is which is to be removed by the reduction, and by which acts the reality-aspect is given. For the meaning of the reduction is to suspend those acts and attitudes which give the reality-aspect and make reality (das Realsein) accessible. 15

What then are, according to Scheler, the acts which "give" the reality-aspect? Scheler gives the following answer: "To be real is not to be object, which means to be the identical whatness for all intellectual acts. To be real, on the contrary, is to be resistant against the primordial spontaneity, which is the same in willing and in attention of all kinds." or: "The acts and impulses, which give the reality-aspect of objects, are . . . always of dynamic instinctive nature." As usual, Scheler does not supply us with an example. But we may think of the drive for food or the drive for power, which Scheler without doubt considers as actualizations of the "dynamic-instinctive nature." The reality-experience, then, of which Scheler speaks, would be an intrinsic aspect of the striving for the satisfaction of these and similar instinctive drives.

Negatively, Scheler's understanding implies that the reality-aspect is not a correlate to pure spiritual acts of knowing. The reality of things, he says, remains beyond the reach of the intellect, of representation, and of thought, "as color for hearing, or the number three for taste and smell." Reality is there already, experierenced in the resistance to spontaneous vital tendencies of an individual, before the intellect awakens and begins to distinguish different qualities, categories, or spheres of *Sosein* or essences, even before a reflective consciousness of the self is established. That is, before the individual becomes aware of himself or establishes himself in reflection as a consciousness-of and thus as a consciousness of different phenomena, he experiences "reality as such." Even on the level of vital tendencies, Scheler says, man does not have first a

consciousness of "his" vital tendencies, but he first experiences "resistance" and only through this experience is he led to an "act of reflection" and thus discovers himself as a center of tendencies. Thus, Scheler defines the impression of reality as the impression of "resistance against the spontaneous activity—be it voluntary or involuntary, be it characterized already as a willing or merely as sense-impulse-which keeps our consciousness in continuous actualization." In other words, the experience of resistance and with this the experience of reality as such is seen as preceding our self-consciousness (Bewusstein) and our "consciousness of things" (Bewusstbaben).

Before we continue on this question about the reality giving acts, we must interject here that the change which takes place in Scheler's development from a theistic to a dynamic pantheistic world-view is most intimately connected with the change in his conception of willing as an act of spirit. In his phenomenological writings, up to and including Vom Ewigen im Menschen, Scheler makes a clearcut distinction between willing as spiritual acts, and the actions of vital tendencies and impulses. However, in the writings of the phenomenological period, as for example in Der Formalismus, Scheler understands acts of willing as a striving-as vital tendencies are striving-and the attributes to these acts "power," that is, ability to cause effects in the sphere of "reality." Reality-experience, therefore, which Scheler describes as an experience of resistance, is an experience of resistance against spiritual acts of willing and against the tendencies of the life-urge (Lebensdrang). In his writings after 1923, however, as for example in "Idealismus-Realismus," Die Stellung des Menschen im Kosmos, or Philosophische Weltanshchauung, Scheler conceives spirit-also as it actualizes itself in the acts of willing-as totally powerless, and correspondingly he attributes "reality" and "reality-experience" only to the tendencies and impulses of "life" or "life-urge."

With the change of his conception of "spirit," the meaning of "life" or "life-urge" also changes. In a preliminary way we can say that in his phenomenological writings "life" or "life-urge" is "metaphysically one principle" which realizes itself in the many forms of living beings and in the activities of these living beings. But in these texts "life" is a creation of "God," the pure spirit. In his writings after 1923 however "life" or "life-urge" is identical with the primordial *Drang* which is an attribute of the ground of being.

Aware of these changes in Scheler's conception of "life" and "spirit," we now return to our question under discussion. For Scheler, the certitude that "reality" is there is not the result of a reasoning process based on certain sensations, which would be given before the experience of "resistance." Nor is "reality" accessible to consciousness through a consideration proceeding from "immanent" data. This is impossible because the subjectivity of consciousness is only established on the basis of the experience of resistance. "The process of becoming conscious on the different levels and in the different degrees is only a consequence of our experiencing the resistance of world," Scheler says. Accordingly, we are not first aware of the spontaneous life-tendencies and later

of the obstacles which they encounter, but vice versa: first we experience resistance "ecstatically." That is, at this point the subject is not even aware of himself; only through the experience of resistance, which engenders the act of reflection, are the life-tendencies and impulses enabled to become conscious.

b. Life-Urge as the Source of Contingent Whatness of Things.

So far as Scheler considers the life-urge as the source of the experience of reality, the question arises: Why does Scheler think that after those acts and attitudes which give the reality-aspect have been removed, a new world of essences will appear? The answer to this question lies exactly in the relationship which Scheler sees between the reality-aspect and the life-urge. For this relationship implies that the reality-aspect is essentially connected with the "vital interest" of man, which is an expression of "life." Human knowledge, so far as it serves the vital interest—and this is the case in the "natural attitude" and in the attitude of the natural scientist—looks upon the things of nature from the point of view of their usefulness to support and further life. But the usefulness of beings in this or that life-situation is not the same as the meaning-unity (Sinneinbeit) or essence of things considered in themselves. The meaning of a rose, of life, of thought, or anything else is not its usefulness, Scheler says.

There is another reason (which is connected with the first one) for Scheler to think that with the suspension of the life-urge and thus with the removal of the reality-aspect, a new world of essences will reveal itself. This reason is that the life-urge itself is the source of the contingent whatness and of the spatial and temporal determinations, which characterize the things as they are perceived in the natural and scientific attitude.

According to Scheler, sense perceptions, in which the contingent whatness of things is given, "... are never conditioned only by the excitation and by the normal procedures in the nerve-system; an impulse of our life-urge is also an absolutely necessary condition for all possible sensations and perceptions."²¹ When Scheler speaks here of "necessary condition," what he means is "having its source in." Actually, according to him, the different external senses operating in unity with the whole nerve-system are themselves organs of the one unified "life" or "life-urge." Thus he really is speaking of a "metaphysical" force which concretizes itself in the different forms of life, and which as a primordial *Drang* or urge forms within the organisms the different senses as means of self-realization.

Things have their contingent whatness or their specific characteristics because they are given in a concrete life-situation. He goes into great detail in order to show that the spatial and temporal determinations of things have their source in the life-tendencies insofar as they are dependent on the "primordial experience of spatiality and of temporality." These, he says, have their "common source in the experience of the power of self-movement or self-alteration of a living being." In contrast to Kant, in other words, Scheler does not put the original experience of spatiality into perception (Anschuauung) but into the experience which a living being has of the power of spontaneous self-movement.²³ The

"objective space" then originates through an objectivation of the experiences of resistances, namely, by correlating the different resistance-experiences with one another. Thus also the individual spatial and temporal determinations of things ultimately depend on the life-urge and its impulses as they are present in the subject.

c. Scheler's Form of the Phenomenological Reduction

In the light of this understanding of "reality" and of the dependence of the reality-aspect on the life-urge, it becomes clear that the meaning which Scheler gives to the phenomenological reduction is a substantially different one from that of Husserl. For the latter, the phenomenological reduction consists in a "radical change of the natural attitude" in which the existence for the world is posited as it is perceived in everyday life or in the positive sciences. To perform the radical change for Husserl means to suspend or "bracket" the judgment of existence. It does not mean to deny the existence of the world or even to doubt it.

For Scheler, however, to perform the phenomenological reduction means "to remove the reality-aspect itself, which gives fulfillment to the predicate of the existential judgment, or to exclude those acts which give the reality-aspect."²⁴ Because the phenomenological reduction consists in such a "rendering ineffective" of those functions which give the reality-aspect, Scheler thinks that the term "method," meaning by this a special mode of thinking, does not fully express the process of reduction. He prefers to speak of a "τεχνη" meaning by this a procedure of "inner action."

Scheler asks: What really could be achieved by merely bracketing the judgment of existence? As far as he is concerned, nothing would be achieved in the line of perceiving pure essences. On the contrary, in such a procedure of suspending the judgment of existence the things that are perceived in the natural attitude would remain the same. All that would happen is that the contingent whatness, the whatness of things insofar as they are of vital importance, would be underlined. As such vitally important objects, they would keep their special place in space and time. A new world, however, the world of pure essences would not be given in intentional consciousness. For this to happen, the world has to be "de-realised," the reality-aspect itself has to be removed. For "with all reality is connected having a place in space and time, a bic et nunc, and beside that a contingent whatness, as sense perception in its restrictedness gives it." And since, as was indicated above, the reality-aspect of the world depends on spontaneous vital tendencies, these tendencies themselves have to be rendered ineffective.

Before concluding let it be mentioned that Scheler's understanding of the phenomenological reduction, as we have presented it here, is without doubt primarily that of the late Scheler. But already in his earlier period, when he wrote *Der Formalismus*, *Das Wesen der Sympathie*, and *Vom Ewigen im Menschen*, he differed from Husserl. For Scheler the reduction was essentially the process

of rendering the reality-giving tendencies ineffective. Only, in this earlier period, Scheler spoke at times of the "resistance-experience" as an experience of "resistance against a spiritual function of the kind that willing is. 26 At this time, Scheler still attributed to the spiritual act of willing the power to act within the sphere of "reality." So, for instance, he considered the divine will as the "creative" force that has caused the existence of the world. In his later years, Scheler conceives of spirit as absolutely powerless, that is as unable to cause something on its own in the sphere of reality. All power is then attributed exclusively to the primordial *Drang*, an attribute of the ground of being. Resistance, in this view, of course, can be experienced only as resistance against the lifeurge, which is in these years identical with primordial *Drang* insofar as it concretizes itself in living beings.

To summarize: Scheler's basic philosophical position was a form of "volitional realism," which he developed in his early philosophical training under the influence of Eucken, Dilthey, and Bergson. When later on he came in contact with Husserl's phenomenology he was already a convinced realist, rejecting Kant's transcendentalism and any form of mediate realism. For him pehnomenology thus had to be incorporated into his realistic philosophy.

- 1 "Die deutsche Philosophie der Gegenwart," in Deutsches Leben der Gegenwart, Philip Witkop, ed., Berlin, Verlag der Bucherfreunde, 1922, p. 188.
 - 2 "Idealismus-Realismus," Philosophischer Anzeiger, II (1927), pp. 281-282.
- 3 Der Formalismus in der Etbik und die Materiale Wertetbik, Vol. II of Gesammelte Werke, 5th ed., Maria Scheler, ed., Bern, Francke Verlag, 1966, p. 68.
- 4 Die Wissensformen und die Gesellschaft, Gesammelte Werke, 2nd ed., Bern, Francke Verlag, 1960, p. 362.
 - 5 Der Formalismus, op. cit., p. 86.
 - 6 Schriften aus dem Nachlass, Gesammelte Werke, 2nd ed., Bern, Francke Verlag, 1957, p. 477.
 - 7 Vom Ewigen im Menschen, Gesammelte Werke, 5th ed., Bern, Francke Verlag, 1968, p. 68.
 - 8 Ibid., p. 89.
 - 9 Schriften aus dem Nachlass, op. cit., p. 381.
 - 10 Der Formalismus, p. 71.
 - 11 Philosophische Weltanschauung, 3rd ed., Maria Scheler, ed., Bern, Francke Verlag, 1968, p. 10
 - 12 Ibid., p. 10.

- 13 Vom Ewigen im Menschen, op cit., p. 195.
- 14 Spinoza, On the Improvement of the Understanding, Spinoza Selections, Edited by Sterling P. Lamprecht. New York, Charles Scribner's Son, p. 5.
 - 15 Idealismus-Realismus, pp. 281-282.
 - 16 Die Wissensformen und die Gesellschaft, op. cit., p. 363.
 - 17 Ibid., p. 138.
 - 18 Ibid., p. 363.
 - 19 Ibid., p. 370.
 - 20 "Idealismus-Realismus", op. cit., p. 291.
 - 21 Die Stellung des Menschen im Kosmos. 7th ed., Bern, Francke Verlag, 1966, p. 54.
 - 22 "Idealismus-Realismus," op. cit. p. 297.
 - 23 Ibid., p. 299.
 - 24 Ibid., p. 282.
 - 25 Die Stellung des Menschen im Kosmos, p. 51.
 - 26 Vom Ewigen im Menschen, p. 215.