

THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE AND THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD IN MAX SCHELER

A FENOMENOLOGIA DA EXPERIÊNCIA RELIGIOSA E O CONHECIMENTO DE DEUS EM MAX SCHELER

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On the Eternal in Man that was prepared for publication in 1920; and lastly his *The Human Place in the Cosmos*, which appeared in 1927. In the final phase of his development, Scheler rejected theism while remaining a nominal Catholic. He developed a metaphysical picture of the *Ens-a-se* which he did not live to clarify and complete. In this metaphysics, God is said to be the Ground of the World existing under two attributes, Spirit and Urge (Drang). This being requires human effort, if it is to “sublimate” the Urge and allow it to come to be as God, absolute, holy, and omnipotent. For we are a “microcosm” that possesses both attributes of God, Geist and Drang, in finite form. This vast and challenging notion inspired in Scheler some reflections in his posthumous works on the spiritual life that opens to those who enter the life of God-in-becoming, and he offers his own prayer to this precarious being. As some historians of philosophy have claimed to find a unity of thought in Scheler’s works, this paper will consider whether such a claim can be made for his concept of the spiritual life as well. We will ask whether the spiritual life described in the late work remains within the boundaries of Christian spirituality or whether it represents a spiritual life of an entirely different kind.

Keywords: Max Scheler; Phenomenology; Spirit/Life; Religious Experience; Religious Reverence; Ressentiment.

Resumo

O objetivo deste artigo é examinar, quanto à sua coerência, algumas afirmações feitas por Max Scheler (1874–1928) acerca da natureza da experiência religiosa e do conhecimento natural de Deus que ela revela independentemente da revelação. Essas afirmações foram formuladas em diferentes etapas de seu desenvolvimento filosófico. A primeira aparece em seu ensaio “Sobre a Reabilitação da Virtude”, de 1913; posteriormente, no ensaio “A Fenomenologia Essencial da Religião”, que constitui uma seção de *Do Eterno no Homem*, obra preparada para publicação em 1920; e, por fim, em *A Posição do Homem no Cosmos*, publicada em 1927. Na fase final de seu desenvolvimento, Scheler rejeitou o teísmo, embora tenha permanecido nominalmente católico. Desenvolveu uma concepção metafísica do *Ens-a-se*, que não chegou a esclarecer e completar antes de sua morte. Nessa metafísica, Deus é concebido como o Fundamento do Mundo, existente sob dois atributos: Espírito e Impulso (*Drang*). Esse ser requer o esforço humano para “sublimar” o Impulso e permitir que ele venha a ser como Deus, absoluto, santo e onipotente. Pois somos um “microcosmo” que possui, sob forma finita, ambos os atributos de Deus, Geist e Drang. Essa concepção ampla e desafiadora inspirou Scheler, em suas obras póstumas, a desenvolver algumas reflexões sobre a vida espiritual que se abre àqueles que ingressam na vida de Deus-em-devir, oferecendo também sua própria oração a esse ser precário. Como alguns historiadores da filosofia afirmaram encontrar uma unidade de pensamento nas obras de Scheler, este artigo examinará se tal afirmação também pode ser sustentada em relação ao seu conceito de vida espiritual. Perguntaremos se a vida espiritual descrita em sua obra tardia permanece dentro dos limites da espiritualidade cristã ou se representa uma vida espiritual de natureza inteiramente diferente.

Palavras-chave: Max Scheler; Fenomenologia; Espírito/Vida; Experiência Religiosa; Reverência Religiosa; *Ressentiment*.

Introduction

Was Max Scheler (1874-1928) a Catholic Christian? He was baptized as a Catholic in 1899. After the moral catastrophe of World War I he sought ways to reestablish culturally and spiritually the Catholic Church in Europe and in Germany. During those years, he published a book on Christian belief called *On the Eternal in Man*, which helped establish him as one of the leading Catholic thinkers in Germany and, after the war, won him a professorship at the Catholic University of Cologne at the invitation of the then Bürgermeister of Cologne, Konrad Adenauer.¹ At his death, according to one acquaintance of mine, he took extreme unction from a priest. However, he attacked the Church for locating its intellectual foundation in Aquinas rather than in Augustine, and he announced his rejection of theism in the second edition of *On the Eternal in Man*. He went on to seek a new form of religious or spiritual experience in the worship of a “God-in-Becoming,” an eternal *Ens-a-se*, characterized by eternal Spirit and living Urge (*Drang*), who needs the embodied human spirit to achieve its apotheosis as God Almighty. Our chief concern here is whether this form of spiritual experience is continuous with or contradictory of the Christian spirituality he examined and lived in the earlier works.

Throughout his life, Scheler was a phenomenologist, first taking direction from Husserl, but then going his own way with the method, especially after the publication of Husserl’s *Ideas* in 1913. He sought the essence in the individual, that is, he wishes to show where and how a universal essential idea may appear from within the phenomena we encounter upon the everyday standpoint: for example, how God may appear in our daily business with life and render that life a spiritual one, that is, a life lived inwardly with and through the Being that reveals itself in religious experience. We will examine in this paper four experiences in which the phenomenon of God may or does enter our lives. They are first, in what I will call the extra-religious spaces, where spirituality has an informal role, and will refer to his early essay “Zur Rehabilitierung der Tugend”² For reasons of brevity, I shall not discuss Scheler’s essay, “Reue und Wiedergeburt,”³ although it offers additional reflections on believers’ extraordinary encounters with God in daily life. Second, I will discuss the sacred as it appears in Christian morality, which Scheler

¹ According to M. Frings, the Catholic Adenauer came to believe that Scheler was “not enough” of a Catholic. Frings, Manfred S. “Max Scheler: An Aphorism of Import.” *Analecta Husserliana*, Vol. LIV (1998), 281-294.

² *Gesammelte Werke*, Band 3. English translation by Eugene Kelly, “On the Rehabilitation of Virtue,” *The American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, 79 (1), W 2005, p. 26.

³ *Gesammelte Werke*, Band 5; English translation by Bernard Noble: *On the Eternal in Man* (New York, Harper, 1960).

analyzes in his essay, “Das Ressentiment im Aufbau der Moralen;”⁴ third, in his phenomenology of religious experience itself, specifically in how we necessarily come to know the constitution of the eidetic phenomenon we identify as God. Lastly, I will consider the kind of spirituality that arises from Scheler’s experience, in the final phase of his life, of what he calls the *Ens-a-se* and ask whether it coheres at all with the religious experience and its spiritual force in the lives of Christians that he described while he was still a theist.

1. *God in daily life.* The virtues of humility and reverence that Scheler sought to rehabilitate were not considered virtues or kinds of human excellence by the ancient Greeks. Indeed, Aristotle looked upon some forms of humility as deficiencies, failures to assert oneself when one ought to do so, and reverence might be thought of by the ancients as merely the payment that the inferior man gives to the stronger. But in a Christian context, both are forms of joyful exuberance, available to anyone at any time. Moreover, for Scheler, these two are only indirectly human virtues. Virtue itself is rather the power one feels in oneself to do what is good in any situation; it is not a boast, but rather a sense that, prior to any specific duties and to actions they may demand, “I am ready!” Ready, that is, to strive after the potential goodness contained in what life or God may throw my way. *Humility* is the similar spiritual preparedness and inclination to serve God and humankind. It is related to a love of others that produces a liberation from one’s ego. Humility is also a necessary condition of true repentance. It is the inward imitation of the Christian idea of divinity, in which the divine being humbly sacrifices Himself on the cross for salvation of humankind. Through humility we learn that we are never “worthy” of God’s grace; indeed, we learn to look humbly on all good things that come our way as a *gift*. The proud man, in his egoism, wants nothing as a gift, for he believes that all good things must be earned by him/herself.

Reverence is not felt only before God and his saints; it is also felt before whatever surpasses our vision as we stand before the formidable and the sublime. It reveals to us the deeper value and being of all things. God, relative to us, is the *Deus absconditus*, mysterious and remote, and not directly visible in the world. But paradoxically the concealed God becomes visible indirectly in the act of reverence, for in it we perceive darkly the mystery of things and the deep value of their existence. As a contemporary philosopher put a similar idea, reverence is “the implicit experience of the supernatural in our every explicit grasp of nature.”⁵ Scheler expresses the idea this way: “Reverence is the unique and necessary attitude of the

⁴*Gesammelte Werke*, Band 3; English translation by Lewis A. Coser: *Ressentiment*, ed. William W. Holden (New York: Schocken, 1972).

⁵David Bentley Hart, *All Things Are Full of Gods* (Yale University Press, 2024), 455.

heart in which [the] *threads into the invisible* achieve spiritual visibility.”⁶ God is made visible through these threads when we approach the world with the sense of how great the deity is and how small we are – while yet sensing that God knows and loves us: What are men, that Thou has concern for them? (Psalm 8: 4)

In our reverence and humility, despite God's absence, we feel ourselves not to be alone in the world. Indeed, the foundational object, or first evidentiary datum, of spirit's frail becoming aware is that “there is not nothing” – that is, absolute nothingness – and the second datum metaphorically “covers up” the first, namely the datum, “there is absolute being,” as an item of essential, not existential knowledge. This first revelation of the world to the infant spirit is a proposition with which Scheler might have wished to supplant the Cartesian *cogito*: “It is!” comes before “I think!” With humility I locate the Absolute in the world before I locate myself as being in the world. Reverence and humility are personal rather than metaphysical or moral responses to existence and can and should be part of any Christian's daily life as a person rather than as a philosopher. For all men and women possess necessarily a transcendental element: the sense of absolute being even in the absence of religious faith in a person's life. We are ontologically rooted in absolute being; the relativist, Scheler says, is the absolutist of relativism, for relativism presupposes insight into the Absolute.⁷

2. *Spirituality in Christian Love and in the Moral Life*. Christian love seeks in sinners not weakness, sickness and sin themselves, but the eternal in man that has been tainted but not destroyed by evil. Scheler notes that “Jesus was mainly interested in the poor, the sick, the wretched and oppressed and showed a mysteriously strange affection for the sinners.”⁸ This interest arises from Jesus' belief that such persons are riper than “good and righteous” people for the soteriological process that feeds on the love given to them by their fellows. But a love of poverty and sickness in themselves is driven by what Scheler calls *Ressentiment*, a term borrowed from Nietzsche, when these conditions are used to condemn their supposed causes, the self-satisfied oppressors. Christ assumes that humankind is sinful, and He takes the world to be as it is; He does not seek a transformation of social and political arrangements; after all, Scheler notes, Christ does not condemn the rule of Caesar as such; He seeks only to redeem persons, which redemption all men and women desire. In Christian practice the love of one's neighbor is a hopeful willingness to assist in the achievement of that end where possible.

According to Scheler, Nietzsche was confused about the nature of Christian

⁶Max Scheler, “Rehabilitierung,” *Gesammelte Werke, Band 3*.

⁷Scheler, Max. *Gesammelte Werke*, Band 5, 96.

⁸Scheler, Max. *Gesammelte Werke*, Band 3, 101.

love when he identified it as the product of *Ressentiment*. No doubt Christian love underwent multifarious “deformations” in its historical encounters with other forms of moral thought, especially with the ethos of the Enlightenment. The belief of Tertullian, noted by Nietzsche, that the joy of the blessed in Heaven will be magnified by the sight of their persecutors burning in Hell is motivated by *Ressentiment*-laden hatred. Scheler does not, however, show that Tertullian is an inauthentic Christian who has deformed an authentic Christian admonition to love one’s neighbors by fallaciously changing the referent of “neighbor” to exclude one’s noble oppressors. Yet Scheler is correct in claiming that Nietzsche and most modern thinkers err by assuming the death of God and separating the admonition to Christian love of one’s neighbors from the Kingdom of God. Once Christian love is separated from God’s kingdom it becomes mere altruism, a *ressentiment*-driven escape from oneself and, to mimic Kant, becomes a Good Will and allows its possessor to think herself at least worthy of happiness.⁹ The *autonomy* of the spirit and *its* values from the values of the vital sphere, such as health, nobility and the power to do good to others, and the *reality* of the Kingdom of God in which these spiritual values have their foundation, are necessary and sufficient conditions of a Christian love that is free of *ressentiment*.

3. The Phenomenology of Religious Experience *and Our Knowledge of God*. We come to know God through a fivefold process: 1) In the order of foundation in which the world as value and meaning becomes manifest to finite spirits ontogenetically and phylogenetically in acts of love; 2) in the revelation of the absolute being to persons in primordial religious acts that are unified, homogeneous and simple and its threefold articulation as *Ens a se*, as omnipotent, and as holy; 3) in the identification of the divine nature by analogy with features of the world seen in the light of God, a process that begins with the identification of God as Spirit (the natural revelation); 4) in the articulation of the idea of God via the self-revelation by grace of the divine and omnipotent *Ens a se* to individuals, and via God’s self-revelation to prophets, granting them a role as the messengers of God’s will to humanity in the form of *revelation*; and 5) in the mediation of mankind’s experience and knowledge of God by the historical and social contexts in which such grace and revelation occurs. Religious acts, in the context of Christian spirituality, are a) voluntary, b) subject to correction by phenomenological re-enactment of them and of their object, and c) provide, therefore, genuine knowledge of what is intended in them, that is, the phenomenal nature of God, though not of God’s existence. This

⁹Cf. Scheler’s analysis of this moral teaching in his essay, “Zur Rehabilitierung der Tugend,” *Gesammelte Werke*, Band 3.

religious experience and its object are closed and autonomous¹⁰ and do not conflict with knowledge in any of the other spheres of knowledge, and its foundations are in fundamental harmony with the focal points of religious belief of the other religions of the world that developed in the Iron Age: there is an *Ens a se*, it is holy, and it is omnipotent. This sense of the *Ens a se* as the holy, infinite Spirit is universal in humankind, although persons approach, apprehend, and live in and through it under various guises.

The defenses of thesis (a) of universality and thesis (b) of irreducibility take the following forms in Scheler.

a) The universality thesis maintains that human beings have an apprehension of the Absolute that lies at the root of our intentional awareness of the world. As Scheler notes, “the relationship of humanity to the sacred through both the religious act and the self-revelation of the divine is constitutive of the *essence of man*.”¹¹ Love, as the defining characteristic of spirit, is the deepest source of our knowledge of Self, World, and God; it opens us to a realm of meaning and value, while hatred closes down and thereby limits our understanding. Without love, human beings would be locked, as animals are, in an environment, and incapable of intentional or cognitive acts. Without knowledge of value there would be no knowledge of absolute being, for the latter is an object of *value*, namely the value of holiness. This sphere of the Absolute is thus second of the spheres of being in the order of foundation after the sphere of values. The primary function of love, upon which the initial evidentiary datum of the not-being of absolute nothingness is founded, is to open us to these spheres.

Scheler’s exhibition of these matters does not describe non-metaphorically how the second evidentiary datum, that of absolute being, arises out of the first. It surely does not do so by means of a logical inference, for “that there is absolute being” does not follow from “there is not nothing;” no essential relation (*Wesenszusammenhang*) is phenomenologically evident here. The relationship is clearly not a simple given, an *Urphänomen* or axiom, as it were. Yet Scheler notes in support of his thesis that not even the atheist can avoid the distinction between absolute and relative being, as far as he recognizes his own contingency and finitude, for the recognition of one’s own finitude presupposes, he believes, a category of absolute being. Scheler writes in “Vom Wesen der Philosophie” that the failure to distinguish sharply absolute from relative being is called *relativism*; yet the relativist is the

¹⁰Scheler, *Gesammelte Werke*, Band 5, 350.

¹¹*Vom Ewigen im Menschen*, *Gesammelte Werke*, Band 5, 171. That is not to say that the relationship (*Bezug*) of man to the sacred is the primordial place of entry of persons into the world, but rather our awareness of value is.

absolutist of the relative (for his relativism *presupposes* insight into the Absolute).

¹² A person is therefore either a believer in the holy Ens-a-se or an idolator who raises finite things to the level of the divine. No doubt the distinctions between the limited and the unlimited, the contingent and the necessary, appear to have deep roots in our minds and our languages, whatever their provenance, necessity, and universality. I find nothing implausible in this idea. The idolator merely requires a kind of phenomenological therapy to correct his idolatry by means of helping him to obtain clear insight into his own capacity for religious experience. Still, the relativist or atheist could maintain that the category of the Absolute, however it may function in our minds, is empty of existential content and given only as a phenomenon.

b) The irreducibility thesis asserts that the human capacity for executing religious acts is founded solely in the primordial givenness of the essence of the Absolute as the second primary datum of experience. It cannot, therefore, be traceable to our experience of items in any of the other spheres, certainly not the empirical sphere. Consequently, Scheler denies that we derive our knowledge of the absolute from empirical experience, such as Schleiermacher's celebrated doctrine that our experience of the Divine is founded in the experience of dependency.¹³ We could not feel such dependency unless we possessed an antecedent awareness of that absolute being on which we were dependent. As a corollary, Scheler notes that we cannot account for the origin of religion any more than we can account for the origin of language. A person does not move *toward* God in a process of discovery; one can only turn *away from* the Absolute, for again the phenomenon is native to the human mind. However, the essential structures that are available to the human mind in religious experience may be *deepened* or *distorted* by knowledge of a different kind. Thus, any naturalistic explanation of the doctrine of monotheism as a response to the physical and social conditions of our evolving species, or by means of putative laws governing our psychosexual development, such as that attempted by Scheler's contemporary Freud, would fail before the phenomenology of the necessary and essential order of foundation of intentional acts. Knowledge of the Absolute must be available before it can be nurtured or distorted by the conditions of psychosocial development. As with the universality thesis, whether the religious sphere is derived in Freudian fashion from the childhood experience of the authority of our fathers as we shrink from the guilt arising from psychosexual conflict and then transfer our anxiety to a new and augmented, yet perhaps more merciful, paternal authority, cannot be excluded by any available phenomenological evidence nor asserted by any available empirical

¹² *Gesammelte Werke*, Band 5, 96.

¹³ Cf.: *The Christian Faith*, Edinburgh, 1999.

evidence.

Scheler adds to his argument for the irreducibility of the religious experience of the Absolute an observation that the intentional acts in which the Absolute is first perceived have roots in regions of the mind beneath empirical awareness, and from those regions we are given data that transcend empirical knowledge and are hence not reducible to it. His reasoning is reminiscent of St. Augustine, who argued, especially in *De Libero Arbitrio* and in *De Magistro*, that we possess an awareness of a possible happiness that is greater than anything we have experienced in this life. This awareness must therefore require an illumination of the mind by God, a grace by means of which our intentional acts may aim at truths that cannot be known by sense experience. The resulting truths are necessary and apodictic. In *De Trinitate* 12, Augustine postulates the origins of a divine light that allows us fallen beings to perceive the certainty and necessity of some truths presented to our judgment.¹⁴ Only because of this divine light are these truths discernable as necessary and eternal by finite minds. For Augustine, this light was an explanation of the (fallen) mind's presumed ability to perceive such truths, and it is posited as a metaphysical reality designed to solve an epistemological problem. Scheler attempts to bolster the irreducibility thesis by using the Augustinian doctrine in a new, different, and, if I may say so, in an illuminating way.

The meaning with which he invests the Latin expression *in lumine dei* is perhaps best expressed in a footnote to *Gesammelte Werke* Band 5, 176. It is precisely in the primordial religious act that we become aware of God as in a *mirror*. We come to see the world's being and essence "in the light" of (formal) divinity. We no longer see God directly; the sun is, as it were, "at our back" as for Faust: "Im farbigen Abglanz haben wir das Leben." We come to see the world's being and essence "in the light of" (formal) divinity. Scheler thus attributes to us an irreducible capacity to view God's light as spread over all things, for the sphere of the Absolute founds all other spheres except that of value; its content transcends the finite world. This is the deeper meaning of the openness to the profundity of being and essence in the peculiar act of love we call reverence: it seeks the reflected light of God in the objects of the world. However, we must accept that divine illumination gives us neither certitude nor content. It is not an intentional act. We see in this light the lines of the relationship of created things to eternal supersensible realities of which there is no direct vision in this life. We see the world in a new way: the mirrored

¹⁴"But we ought rather to believe, that the intellectual mind is so formed in its nature as to see those things, which by the disposition of the Creator are subjoined to things intelligible in a natural order, by a sort of incorporeal light of an unique kind . . ." (Augustine, *De Trinitate*, Book XII, Chapter XV, in *Basic Writings of Saint Augustine*, p. 824).

light of God in all things enables the awed engagement by which we long to peer beyond the known.

In religious experience, the first mirror of God in the world is the human spirit.¹⁵ We experience spirit as the primary creation of God, and as the means to His self-revelation in man as a reflected glory. In this act we experience ourselves as a mirror of God: we come also by these means for the first time in possession of ourselves as persons. Thus, we come to see the Absolute Spirit reflected in the spirit of human beings before we see it reflected in the physical world. The connection between God and the world as its omniscient creator is then mediated by finite spirit as it takes part epistemically in the essential structure of the world. Here, of course, we have begun to enter the Abrahamic perspective on God: that He is personal spirit, and man is created in His image as the microcosmic spirit. At this point, and only then, do we proceed, in Scheler's estimation, to form analogies between God as the holy omnipotent absolute spirit and the world created by Him as the omnipotent Artist. God becomes known as spirit – and so as a person – in the objects of the world by our first learning to see the world in the light of God. The religious man enacts a movement of the soul that Scheler says is “wie ein unerhörtes geheimnisvolles Drama in den tiefsten Tiefen der Seele,”¹⁶ in which appears the special dignity of the human spirit and its function as the primary mirror of God. “A single soul would suffice to make God knowable to us as spirit,” whereas the world itself would not.¹⁷ In this process appears also the sublime *indifference* of our knowledge of God to our knowledge of the world. No changes in scientific paradigms will change our idea of the spirituality of God and the created objects of the world as reflected in the divine spirit. But in turn we see again the futility of attempts to “prove” God's existence by means of inferences such as the cosmological arguments. Our knowledge of God does not deepen our knowledge of, say, the complexity of biological structures (as some argue today under the rubric of intelligent design), nor does knowledge of these structures deepen our knowledge of God.

A further key to the meaning of “in lumine Dei” in the phenomenology of the religious act is the experience of the “suffusion” (*hineinleuchten*)¹⁸ of the world and its essential structure by the infinite divine reason. The being of the world, or of nature, or the certainty with which its essence and structure is known, is not thereby affected; this “suffusion” is not an act of creation. It leaves the empirical world alone. But in that light, we see the world mystically, as it appears in Giovanni

¹⁵Scheler, *Gesammelte Werke*, Band 5, 190-91.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 183.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 190-91.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 164.

Bellini's magnificent work "St. Francis in the Desert": the painting seems to depict not a moment of natural revelation, but of sudden grace. Nothing of the nature of the things changes at that moment – everything is just as it appears naturally – except the light. In that light, Francis perceives God as in a mirror. Like him, we can see the same natural everyday objects in a new way, once we have already accepted the testimony of our primordial wordless experience of the Absolute and assured ourselves in faith of God's existence. As in the "farbigen Abglanz" we have life, so *upon* and *in* the things suffused by the light of God the religious mind enjoys the presence of God. God's spirit is the light that infuses all things, even knowledge itself, with glory.¹⁹ Indeed, Scheler's "Wesensphänomenologie der Religion" is precisely a re-enactment of the religious acts executed *in lumine Dei*, in which we see the same essential structure of the world revealed by phenomenology, as in a mirror by which God becomes darkly visible, and His nature becomes expressible in analogies with things. Scheler invites us to re-experience, in his phenomenological *Aufweisen*, the acts peculiar to the religious awareness. This procedure culminates in the isolation of what Scheler calls the irreducible characteristics of the religious act: 1. In it, we transcend the everyday; 2. This transcendence can be fulfilled only by an object perceived as holy; 3. The act is fulfilled only by a self-revealing divine being that gives itself to man, such that all knowledge of God is knowledge through God.²⁰ Such acts, which occur prior to empirical experience, intend meanings transcendent of empirical experience, which, again, cannot be derived from it.

The reverential motivation of his inquiry, and his use of the term "adoption" (*Aufnahme*) in the third characteristic, both point to an ambiguity in Scheler's procedure. Is Scheler's "Wesensphänomenologie der Religion" merely a descriptive science of the ideal essential acts and their objects executed by a person who has in some extra-philosophical manner assured himself of the existence of the *Ens a se*?²¹ Or is Scheler's work itself a contribution to a new kind of natural theology that is apologetic in intention, that is, it attempts to assure us of the legitimacy and plausibility of the religious life? Initially the answer would appear to be that it is not apologetic, since Scheler rejects all means of establishing God's existence that do not emerge from religious experience itself. Specifically, Scheler's hostility to the traditional proofs of the existence of God is based not simply upon the undesirabil-

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 298-99.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 244-45.

²¹Scheler argues in "Die Wesensphänomenologie der Religion" that the process whereby one assures oneself of the existence of God may take two forms: the direct and the indirect. In the first, Scheler appears to refer to something like a spontaneous leap of faith; in the second, one goes from the consideration of the essential assumptions of one's native culture to an entirely new level in which those assumptions are taken to be true.

ity of allowing metaphysics to move from its rightful sphere as a phenomenological undertaking to a “probably true” account of what is real, where it will then enter inevitably into conflict with empirical science. His hostility is rather to the forgetfulness by natural theologians that their proofs are founded upon a prior real encounter with God. Without such experiences, the premises of theology would be entirely incomprehensible, and issue from a mental fog containing only itself. This is perhaps a valid example of falling to the verifiability criterion of meaningfulness.²²

Scheler first finds this forgetful attitude in Aquinas, who passes from the world to God rather than from God to the world: for Scheler, we see the world in the light of God, not God in the light of the world. The latter puts the horse of natural religious experience before the cart of discursive knowledge. Proofs are hence futile, for their meaning presupposes what they are trying to prove, and they distort the soul’s true road to God, and its “capacity for intuitive emotional contact with the Divinity,”²³ which encourages symbolic attributions to God as mirroring Himself in the world. All of reality is suffused with mind: this is a phenomenological, but not analytical *Wesenszusammenhang*. But only religious experience, not discursive inference, can see the world in this divine light. In faith, the mind proceeds by analogies that pass from the nature of the illuminated objects to the nature of the light that shines on them. It sees the act of divine creation mirrored in the work of the artist; the divine love for each person is mirrored in love of one person for another; in temporal phenomena we see eternity reflected; in spatial phenomena the ubiquity, in magnitude the immeasurability of God.

4. *Spirituality in Scheler’s “God-in Becoming.”* In the second preface to *On the Eternal in Man* Scheler announced his departure from theism. His reasons for this apostasy are unclear, but they appear to be traceable to his incapacity to respond adequately to the problem of evil. In any case, the last six years of his life were dedicated to three large projects. The first is a philosophical anthropology, consistent with biological science and with phenomenological philosophy, that will give us a more adequate conception of the human being than was heretofore possible. The second was work on his notion that his times were entering the Age of *Ausgleich* or balancing-out – in analogy with the balancing out of a bank account or a budget – of the tensions and oppositions in Europe and the world. The third was the

²²The “verification” lies in religious experience itself: all attempts at verification are meaningless without that experiential encounter.

²³*Gesammelte Werke*, Band 5, 239. Scheler notes in the essay, “Warum keine neue Religion?” (in *Gesammelte Werke* Band 5) that it must be counted a fault, and not an error, not to hear the whisper of the personal loving deity in one’s deep personal nucleus. He forgets that this failure to hear is hardly a fault if one cannot assure oneself of the existence of the *Ens a se* as the author of the whisper.

development of a new theology (although Scheler does not use that term) based on his large and original metaphysical picture of the world and God.

He postulates that the world is the meeting-place of two opposed modes of being: the *Drang* or urge or the life drives, which have the causal power to determine the *Dasein* or being-there of things, and the Spirit, which is causally impotent but laden with ideas that could be realized by the *Drang* as the *Sosein* or the being-such of existing things. These two principles are not essentially distinct, as are the Cartesian categories of mind and matter; they are locked into each other perhaps in a Yin-Yang fashion. Spirit places ideas of what can and ought to be achieved in the world before the drives or “real” factors in history and the drives may or may not act to realize those ideas. Thus, the Ens-a-se, as *Geist* and *Drang*, provides the ideational content and motive power of all that is. Significantly, human beings share this duality with the cosmos at large. Real factors are biological and physical need; they cause things to happen. The ideal factors such as the idea of the Ens-a-se itself must be presented to the drives if they are to be realized. They are the bait, as Scheler calls them, that attract the attention of the drives and tempt them into action. They illuminate the drives, which, despite their blindness, are presumably receptive of such illuminations of the mind and may decide to realize them – or not.

I have argued elsewhere²⁴ that Scheler’s concept of the person, which was central to his philosophy of religion, where persons reach out to a personal God whose mind ranges over the entire realm of essences, becomes lost in Scheler’s final theology. For the Ens-a-se seems not to be a person but a person-in-becoming: it does not range over the realm of values but only of those it has access to by means of the finite self-spiritualization of human beings. The “Einsatz” or willing involvement of the human person in this process – perhaps a new manifestation of reverence – seems to be an active spiritual principle functioning as God’s *Mitarbeiter* and not an individual person of flesh and blood and spirit. The human person seems to have metaphysical but no religious value; it becomes lost in its metaphysical function and is no longer celebrated for its uniqueness and closeness to God as His willing but often naughty child. Nor is there here what is so important for Christians, the encounter with the person of Christ. Yet what can be more holy if not the personhood of God? The human being as such is called forth to achieve a task for which his personal individuality is of little significance. We function more as a plumber than as an artist, or, even less as a moral person for whom, according to the earlier Scheler if not for Kant, our individuality is supremely significant.

²⁴Eugene Kelly, “Das Schicksal des Personenbegriffs im Spätwerk Schelers,” in *Thaumazein* 3, 2015, pp. 417-432.

God is a God in becoming, a becoming that humans foster not by worship or even by reverence and humility but by striving to grasp and assimilate in themselves the highest values to which they have access, to make them functional in their spirit, and to tempt the *Ens-a-se* as Drive to realize them, thus endowing these higher values with active spirit. This balancing-out on the highest level is a form of sublimation, a Freudian term that Scheler uses for his purposes. The *Drang* gradually becomes spiritual and the spirit through our own efforts becomes potent. The *Ens-a-se* then becomes the absolute personal God, and we are no longer the children of God, we are the active participants, the *Mitarbeiter* in the coming-to-be of God. Thus, in *The Human Place in the Cosmos* Scheler delivers an unusual admonition to believers: God needs our commitment to this process of healing and reconciliation. He argues that a deity that must struggle with us in a world full of uncertainty and evil is a far better companion and a far better recipient of our prayers and our efforts than God Almighty.

Bertrand Russell once spoke of humankind's "cruel thirst for worship." Scheler's worship of the *Ens-a-se* is less cruel than worship before Absolute Being, from whom we stand at an infinite distance. Although touching, and filled with a sense of relief, is Scheler's meditation on the God-to-Be, his meditation does not represent the religious spirituality that approaches the religious experience of members of the great religions. Worship of the *Ens a se* is inappropriate, for it is not infinite being in its absolute fullness and thus worthy of worship, whether thirsting for it is cruel or not. It is hard to understand how this God could grant salvation to Scheler. It does not, in Scheler's description of it, speak to the deepest spiritual longings of men and women; there is hope here for moral and intellectual growth but not for salvation. Scheler claims that his later work grew out of his earlier. I doubt that the unity of at least two features of his thought – the idea of the person and the philosophy of religion – can be maintained. However, he expresses his spiritual life after abandoning theism in some late passages, written, it would seem, as prayers to the *Geist/Drang* as *Ens-a-se* in becoming. I have abbreviated and retranslated two pieces of this kind from the posthumous work.

Gesammelte Werke, Band 15, pp. 182-84

From "God."

Certainly, God sees everything that exists and happens in one glance of his spirit, but He loves in part and He hates in part what He looks upon. If He were omnipotent spirit, He would *have* to avoid what is bad and evil. It is useless to say that He sees in advance what He does not love and want. For what He does not "permit" cannot exist. And permitting is of course the only form of His wanting or

not wanting thus and so.

O God: Only since this time am I able to pray with a pure heart to You and love You since I know: You are not the originator or bear the responsibility for the existence and becoming of this world. Since that time my heart is given rest and is protected and redeemed completely in You. . . .

He has “providence” but not absolute sovereignty over the world. Only at the end of all time will He be the all-powerful Lord, that is, He will depose Jehovah the “creator” and “lawgiver.”

Yes, God is a “stranger,” a complete “other.” Only what you as spirit directly sense and behold from Him—is grasped as spirit (immediate knowledge of God). Out of his works you can infer only his “logic” not His eternal secret, his “intimate persona . . .”

God the “Lord” is God’s second attribute. The first attribute is his “impatient” love.

The existence of God is not the first thing, rather His essence is. Then, although existence does not follow from essence—not even in God—all existence is given “limits” and ideal possibility. . . . Prayers to the eternally infinite love that is destined to eternal power and reality: that is *our* religious attitude.

In the “love” of an omnipotent God we fall back into Calvinism and majestum (Barth, Gogarten, Otto) and we submit absolutely—without question as to the “being” or activity of the “Lord.” But was the epoch of reason and humanism in vain? They then saw correctly that what is all powerful is not “lovable” and love is not all powerful. But from that their thesis does not follow—rather “ours” does, that is, that God in God is alien and is only love and wisdom—but *not almighty*.

I pray to you my God as spirit. I admire and fear thy eternally surging (*drängende*) “natura.” But I know—Thou art “ambiguous” and I must decide *myself* for thy higher nature—since I originate from it.

Gesammelte Werke, Band 15, pp. 184-86.

From “Dogmas of My Religion” (1921)

1. God let the world come to be (did not create) out of Himself *necessarily* for his own sake, i.e., to become what he was not, and could not have been *without* the world. Thus, out of himself, a) not out of nothing; b) not out of preexisting matter.
2. The entire world is in God, but God is not only spirit, reason, but also all-life (panentheism and irrationality of the divine ground of the world).
3. God takes on flesh in the “world” just insofar as He is not entirely “Lord” over himself, that is, a harmonious spirit-creature. Only when the world is complete—is God God. The primordial essence has only idea from God—it *is* not God.

4. All historical being and activity of the human being extends its meaning over the being and condition of the divinity. Every pain vibrates in him.
5. God redeems himself in us, through us, for us, we for Him, in Him, through Him.
8. The only way there is: Each person confronts the world directly and feels that he has only *one* life and *one* risk to take. Only the most extreme individualism (in the spirit of an all-encompassing solidarity) can save us. Never socialism.
9. All historical natures are equally justified! And equally valuable—before God. The grain of sand and Goethe; the same right to existence—when it is a) genuine b) knows and does what it is. Plant—animal—human. I walk always among equals. This belief alone (*sola fides*)—will *make* you blessed and thereby make you good. Be without fear, be you—only you—have faith in yourself, that is, in your soul. ...
10. The soul as spirit is indestructible.
12. When God spoke to me: the guilt is *Mine* for which you hold yourself to be guilty—have no fear! I was born again, and I knew from an [?infinite] perspective who God is. ... I also saw that guilt is not “guilt” but only God wrestling with himself. ...

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