

## Non-being in Scheler's thought

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This article deals with Scheler's treatment of negation and difference. He includes, in a work on the philosophy of religion written in 1921, within his phenomenological period, a short explanation of the philosophical method, dealing with the nature of philosophical inquiry, the requirements which it poses to the philosopher, and the emergence of the fundamental, self-evident principles which underpin it. Scheler speaks of the overcoming of "absolute nothingness" as an indispensable part of the beginnings of philosophy and of the discovery of being. Paradoxically, however, "nothingness", difference and privation are the features of reality Scheler's thought finds most difficult to embrace. Scheler tries to include these features in the phenomenological *Wesensschau*, but this seeks self-identity and passes over their specifically *limited* and paradoxical character. Any *difference*, for Scheler as for Plato, is beyond being. In this article we suggest that Scheler's approach offered little hope of discovering the difference which is at the heart of being, and that this limitation was at work even during his phenomenological period, within the notion of being which it presupposed.

### 1. Non-being and the Primary Evidence of Being

Scheler offers a treatment, in an introductory section of *On the Eternal in Man*, of the basic principles of the philosophical knowledge of being<sup>1</sup>. Philosophy begins

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<sup>1</sup> *On the Eternal in Man* was Scheler's main contribution to the area of religious philosophy. It was first published in 1921, with Scheler at the peak of his philosophical career. It appears as Volume V of the Collected Works (Gesammelte Werke, [Francke, Berne Vols I-XI, 1954-79, Bouvier, Bonn, Vols XII- XIV, 1987-93]; references to the Collected Works in subsequent footnotes will consist of the volume number and page number). There is an English translation by Bernard Noble, with foreword by August Brunner: *On the Eternal in Man*, SCM Press, London 1960. The Jesuit scholar Erich Przywara remarked at the time that «Max Scheler's laying of the foundations of religion [would] constitute a turning point in German philosophy comparable with Husserl's works in the areas of epistemology and logic» (*Religionsbegründung Max Scheler-J.H. Newman*, Herder, Freiburg 1923, p. 1).

in wonder, the astonishment which one feels at realising that things are. We cannot escape this wonderment and we cannot avoid asking the question *why*. «Why beings and not rather nothing?». This question is inescapable, once one has reached the philosophical level of thinking. But that is not lightly achieved. The price to be paid is a moral, indeed ascetical effort, a thoroughgoing humility in the face of the given, which manages to get beyond the partial, selfish and unquestioning attitudes characterizing both the scientific and natural world-views. Once that moral preparation or upsurge (*Aufschwung*) has paved the way, one is ready to sense the complete contingency of reality, and to experience the wonder with which philosophy begins<sup>2</sup>.

At that stage one is capable of seeing the three fundamental philosophical insights. The first is: «*There is something* (in general) or, to put it more accurately ... *there is not nothing*» where “nothing” denotes not merely the non-existence of a thing, but rather absolute nothing<sup>3</sup>. This is both self-evident and a source of wonder — once one has ceased to take the world for granted. One has to look into the abyss of absolute nothing in order to achieve the strictly philosophical awareness of being, to be aware of the eminent positiveness inherent in the insight that there is something rather than nothing.

The second basic insight, grounded in the first, is: there is an absolute being, on which all the other beings depend for their existence. This being can be termed the *ens pro se*, the *ens a se* or the *ens per se*, depending on the aspect one wishes to express. There is a direct intuition of this insight, and it follows directly on the awareness of the first insight, and on the “miraculous repealing” of the possibility of absolute nothing which it involved<sup>4</sup>.

The third insight is that in all beings other than the first there is a real distinction between essence and existence. It is a *real* distinction in relative and contingent beings, and a *logical* one in the absolute being, since they can be envisaged hypothetically as a dichotomy, but its existence necessarily follows from its essence.

These three insights, according to Scheler, assure a profitable and progressive metaphysics, allowing for the development of the study of man, the world and God on a self-evident basis. In this way Scheler is confident that he can place philosophy on a firmer footing than the sciences, retrieving it from the sphere of inductions and enumerations and enabling it to generate *a priori* valid statements about contingent existents both in themselves and in their relationship to the absolute<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> The moral upsurge opens to us «the cognitive possibilities of the self-contained realm of being which is philosophy’s concern». *On the Eternal in Man*, p. 90 (V, p. 85).

<sup>3</sup> *On the Eternal in Man*, p. 98 (V, p. 93).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 101 (V, p. 95).

<sup>5</sup> Cfr. *ibid.*, p. 104 (V, p. 98). SCHELER viewed Husserl’s programme of making philosophy a truly scientific discipline with caution. While rigorous, it does not imitate the exact sciences by insisting on the same canons of accuracy that they do, as Scheler explains in *The Theory of the Three Facts*, in M. SCHELER, *Selected Philosophical Essays*, (hereafter cited as SPE) edited by David Lachtermann, Northwestern University Press, Evanston 1973, p. 255 (X, pp. 476-7) and *On the Eternal in Man*, p. 80 (V, p. 74): «If I ... deny that philosophy, while queen of the sciences, strictly belongs *among* them I should like to justify this unorthodox use without further delay. It would be particularly apposite to justify it against that of E. Husserl, who, while his idea of philosophy is in a material sense closest to that here expounded, expressly terms philosophy “a science”». Scheler believed both that philosophy is scientific and that it has a self-evidence and immediacy which experimental science lacks.

But what sort of philosophy of being is Scheler inaugurating? In fact we can glean from what has been said what exactly he means by “being”. The first point to be raised is the part played by nothingness in the argument. It has a very important place, for the first insight is “more accurately” the rejection of nothing than the affirmation of being. Scheler asserts quite categorically that the nothing he has in mind is *absolute* nothingness, the total absence of both essence and existence. It is not a relative non-being or privation.

But to take such a notion of absolute nothingness as the starting-point of a philosophy is a questionable proceeding. It is not the first notion which comes to the mind, permitting the emergence of the rest. The most one could say is that it is a notion that the mind can generate in a totally fictitious and negative way, by starting from some general idea of reality or the world or all of the world that one can think of and then proceeding to deny that. It does not stand up to investigation as a primary datum. It is in fact quite difficult to achieve a real and evident awareness of it. If «it is more true that our mind is conceived in being than that being is conceived in our mind»<sup>6</sup>, then Scheler’s notion of being suffers precisely from having been conceived in our minds, in their activity of denying the denial of being and proceeding as though this were a metaphysical discovery.

Secondly, even if one did grant the mind this ability, there is a further consequence to contend with: that once one has revoked it, and asserted that *au contraire* something does exist, the being which is involved is merely the denial, the contradiction of nothing. One may not extrapolate to statements about its qualities or features, or about its mode of being. One can only say that it *is*. This may well leave Scheler’s first insight intact, but at the cost of its usefulness. For if we cannot say anything about the something we have discovered beyond the fact that it is rather than not, then metaphysics will have come to a full stop. Such a minimal concept of being could not have room for the free play of *difference*, which many metaphysical considerations involve. So, for example, in Scheler’s phenomenological thought the notion of substance *vis à vis* accident is lacking, for this relationship is simply an object of the naive «natural attitude»<sup>7</sup>. In his later, panentheistic period he turns to an all-inclusive absolute and undifferentiated substance, in which God, man and world are contained<sup>8</sup>.

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Scientific judgements and propositions are forms of mediate knowledge and need phenomenological clarification.

<sup>6</sup> B. KELLY, *The Metaphysical Background of Analogy*, Aquinas Society of London, Paper 29, Blackfriars, London 1958, p. 21.

<sup>7</sup> On the natural attitude, which cannot reach the «things themselves», cfr. *The Theory of the Three Facts* in SPE, p. 221 (X, p. 448). Man, for instance, is not a substance, for he is not a single nature, but an amalgam of spirit and life, the principles of Scheler’s deep-seated dualism. Whatever unity he does possess is based on his reaching forward, beyond himself, towards God (cf. *Zur Idee des Menschen*, III, pp. 182-95). The material world was also non-substantial, representing merely the «appearance» of the underlying drives. Spirit was not regarded as substance since it was totally active.

<sup>8</sup> F. DUNLOP’s *Scheler*, Claridge, London 1991, pp. 71-84, offers a useful and accurate account of the complexities of Scheler’s later panentheistic theory, which has only been available for investigation with the appearance since 1987 of sections of Scheler’s later, unfinished works on metaphysics and anthropology. For the view that this later thought is a retrieval of some aspects of the notion of substance, cfr P. GOREVAN, *Max Scheler:*

Scheler, however, does not see this difficulty with his first self-evident insight, for he proceeds, as we saw, to a second self-evident insight which actually asserts a rather important quality of the being: its *contingence*. From this it is of course a short step to the third self-evident insight, that of the existence of the absolute being which alone can guarantee and explain the existence of a relative and contingent entity. But it is not really licit, on his own terms, for Scheler to do this. James Collins speaks here of the “smuggling in” of almost an entire theory of being into the unconditionally first judgement<sup>9</sup>. It is hard to disagree with this, for Scheler assumes that the “something” which has escaped non-being is *contingent* and hence in need of underpinning by the absolute and necessary being. But this is just an assumption. Scheler never advances evidence to show that any beings are contingent.

Other features of the use of the concept of being reinforce this impression. *Dasein*, *Sosein* and *Wertsein* are what he terms the basic modes (*Grundarten*) of being<sup>10</sup>. Scheler tends to speak about species or modes of being as though being were a genus, separate from the types which go to make it up. In *On the Eternal in Man* he says that the first self-evident insight, «there is something», is evident no matter which of the secondary categories of being one may observe<sup>11</sup>. These species are quite different from one another, but not as beings. In this they are quite identical, there is nothing distinct about their meaning as beings.

When he comes to speak of being in itself, «das reine Sein», it is in precisely this sense: he needs a conception of being which is large and extensive enough to «include God and the world, good and evil, truth and falsehood, appearance and reality, something and nothing, the perfect and the imperfect, the finite and the infinite»<sup>12</sup>. There is no real content which can be said to apply to such a notion, it will not be differentiated until it finds application to one of the sub-species or regions of reality: to intra-mental or extra-mental, finite or infinite, substantial or accidental being.

The common objection urged against this univocal concept of being is that it makes being become a genus. The differences which would give rise to species within the genus, would have to be *nothing*. Everyone admits that being is that in which all things agree; but surely it must also be that through which things can *differ* from one another, if the differences are to be real.

So Scheler’s attempt to start a metaphysics of being by defining being as “that which is not nothing” is essentially a false start. It does not permit an experience of being of the depth and variety which is needed. It cannot, for example, account for the experience of contingency to which he so quickly turns.

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*Phenomenology and Beyond*, in *At the Heart of the Real* (edited by F. O’Rourke), Dublin 1992, pp. 285-94.

<sup>9</sup> *Roots of Scheler’s Evolutionary Pantheism*, in *Crossroads in Philosophy* (edited by J. Collins), Regnery, Chicago 1969, p. 117.

<sup>10</sup> *Schriften aus dem Nachlaß* II, XI, p. 61.

<sup>11</sup> Cfr. *On the Eternal in Man*, p. 99 (V, p. 93).

<sup>12</sup> *Absolutsphäre und Realsetzung der Gottesidee*, in *Schriften aus dem Nachlaß* I, X, p. 252. “Nothing”, here may well be merely a relative nothing, since it is opposed to “*Etwas*” rather than to *Sein* (cfr. B. BRENK, *Metaphysik des einen und absoluten Seins*, Hain, Meisenheim am Glan 1975, p. 158).

## 2. Non-Being in Scheler's Phenomenology

A praiseworthy aspect of Scheler's starting point is the attempt to give an account of the role of negation in the development of the notion of being. Scheler goes so far as to say that the first evidence is put "more accurately" when we express it in this negative way. Here he is correct in pointing out the significant part played by the negative side of our intellectual approach in coming to a complete knowledge of reality. Being is not a self-identical idea, totally determinate and conceptualizable. It offers us a pluralism of facets and this enables us to account for the experiences of limitation, change and variety. This experience is not added on to reality but it forms part of our most spontaneous and immediate contact with it. Contemporary philosophy has stressed this negative moment of our knowledge of being. It emerges from an experience of difference and of limitation, and this very experience adds to the completeness of our notion of reality. Being is not merely self-identity. It has long been held that it is discovered more originally in the experience of non-contradiction than of identity<sup>13</sup>. The contribution of Heidegger's path towards being is also well known<sup>14</sup>. Being can be best understood by facing up to its negative and potential aspects.

Scheler himself points to the ability we possess to deny the demands of existential reality as the quality which most distinguishes human nature. The overcoming of the abyss of absolute nothingness remains with us throughout our thinking of being. If we are not constantly adverting to this, we will live our lives in a state of "carefree giddiness". For Manfred Frings, this is the «inauthentic being towards death» which is characterised in *Being and Time*<sup>15</sup>. Man is the "Neinsagenkönner", the one who can say "No" to reality and to life<sup>16</sup>. This version of the phenomenological reduction is a highly moral and ascetic one. It is not enough, he argued against Husserl, to «set aside the factor of reality» or to «set aside the existential judgement». That is child's play<sup>17</sup>. It is necessary also to put out of operation the functions which furnish us with the factor of reality—in particular, the will.

But when we look a little more closely at Scheler's own manner of thinking about being and non-being, it soon becomes clear that it does not go far enough. For his encounter with non-being, at the beginning of his philosophy, is a short and appa-

<sup>13</sup> Cfr. J. WÉBERT, *Le rôle de l'opposition en métaphysique*, «Revue des Sciences Philosophiques et Théologiques», 14 (1925), pp. 308-9. Wébert points out that the principle of identity is a relative late-comer in philosophical discourse and that the experience of contradiction is prior.

<sup>14</sup> For a comparison between Scheler's and Heidegger's views on "Nothing" cfr. F. SCHALOW, *The Anomaly of World: From Scheler to Heidegger*, «Man and World», 24 (1991), pp. 75-87.

<sup>15</sup> Cfr. M. FRINGS, *Nothingness and Being. A Schelerian Comment*, «Research in Phenomenology», 7 (1979), pp. 182-89.

<sup>16</sup> *Die Stellung des Menschen im Kosmos*, IX, p. 44.

<sup>17</sup> *Idealism and Realism*, SPE, pp. 316-317 (IX, pp. 207-208). This ethical version of the phenomenological bracketing of reality might, paradoxically, serve to make it less radical and final. Scheler's suspicion of Husserl's later philosophy and its leanings towards a transcendental idealism are well known and are expressed in his review of contemporary German philosophy (cfr. *Die deutsche Philosophie der Gegenwart*, VII, p. 311).

rently victorious one, which does not leave any marks on his subsequent development. It is overcome in the first evidence (“there is not nothing”) and overcome quite easily. This is no wonder since, as we have mentioned, the concept of “absolute nothing” which he does face and destroy is merely a chimera. It cannot have any ontological status aside from our ability to conceive a more or less total absence of being. Once this chimera has been brushed aside, Scheler considers himself free to develop a metaphysics which is most affirmative and integral, which sees the different levels of reality as “given” to our thought in evidences of complete translucence. Even the most negative and obscure aspects of things become, in Scheler’s hands, positive and evident essences. If they are not given in that way, he insists, they are not given at all. Examples which can serve to illustrate this are nothingness, evil and death.

*Nothingness*, as we noted already, is dealt with in the approach to the first evidence. It is the moment to be overcome before that evidence breaks forth in all its completeness. But the nothingness involved is of a very definite kind: it is absolute and total. It is devoid of both *Sosein* and *Dasein*. There is nothing there except our ability to deny, practised at a most total and sweeping level. To dignify this concept with the term “Absolute” and to classify it as a positive phenomenon is questionable. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that it is a creation of our spirit than that it is *given* to us intentionally<sup>18</sup>.

In the second place, Scheler’s treatment of *evil* is an example of this approach. For Scheler, evil is a positive feature of reality, «a necessary constituent of the world», rather than a lack of due good, for goodness and value are not interchangeable with being<sup>19</sup>. Over and over, in his dialogue with Kant’s *Critique*, he claims that value and goodness are *a priori* realities, independent of the things or qualities that bear them. Values can always be thought of without having to consider them as properties of such a bearer<sup>20</sup>. Scheler can then go on to say that evil, *qua* evil, can be willed, for the will does not have any tendency or connaturality towards goodness. It can in fact will evil as evil. The will’s task is simply the execution of the *ordo amoris*, the personal order of the heart, which may or may not involve evil<sup>21</sup>. Scheler

<sup>18</sup> Scheler defines being in such a way that there could even be a contrary opposition—that is, an opposition within the same genus—between God and *Nothing* (cfr. *On the Eternal in Man*, p. 270 (V, p. 264) and B. BRENK, *Metaphysik des einen und absoluten Seins*, p. 148).

<sup>19</sup> *On the Eternal in Man*, p. 234 (V, p. 228).

<sup>20</sup> *Der Formalismus in der Ethik und die materiale Wertethik*, Volume II of Scheler’s Collected Works. There is an English translation by Manfred Frings and Roger Funk, *Formalism in Ethics and Non-formal Ethics of Values*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston 1973. This argument is to be found on pp. 12-13 of Formalism (II, pp. 35-36). In an earlier work, Scheler had remarked that value, ultimately, «is not» (*Beziehungen zwischen den logischen und ethischen Prinzipien*, I, p. 98). One can say that «[t]here is a unique emphasis or orientation in which value—the good—takes on a radical priority, a predominance over “neutral being” more fundamental than that found in Plato» (R.D. SWEENEY, *The Great Chain of Being and Scheler*, «Analecta Husserliana», 11 (1979), p. 110).

<sup>21</sup> «We do not at all agree with ... the claim “omnia volumus sub specie boni”» (*Formalism*, p. 583 fn [II, p. 569, fn]). Scheler’s theory of the will is coloured—as is so much of his ethical theory—by his attack on Kantian formalism, which placed the centre of moral gravity in the will and the formal correctness of its attitudes. Scheler downgrades the will’s role to that of a servant of the objective order of values, the «*ordre du coeur*». «I know that the objects I



was always ready to affirm the positive ontological status of evil, since evil was certainly to be regarded as a *Wesen*. In his later thought he actually goes the way of Schelling in *On Human Freedom*, where evil is also regarded as a positive reality and needs, therefore, to be traced back to its source within the Godhead<sup>22</sup>.

Other lacks and imperfections - *death*, for example - are also treated as though they were positive realities. There is a “metaphysics of death” which is dealt with in Scheler’s late work *Das Wesen des Todes*<sup>23</sup>. He had already dealt with death in essays dating from the phenomenological period and there too death has a positive role to play: it is the goal of the life process which cannot properly be understood without it. «One dies one’s death»<sup>24</sup>. In the later, post-1923 works Scheler does modify his view slightly: death is a negation of life, and it is from life that we must begin<sup>25</sup>. The reason for this change is that in his later thought Scheler transcends the strictly phenomenological standpoint. While to every genuine phenomenon there must belong a *Dasein*, death is a «negative concept»<sup>26</sup>. In this final phase of Scheler’s thought the universal Life (*Alleben*), a facet of Absolute Substance, becomes the purpose of material reality and in each death it appropriates to itself the energy and life of what has been thus lost at the individual level<sup>27</sup>. In this more metaphysical theory death can have a relatively negative or at least transitory situation in the development of what is truly real: the universal principle of life.

These examples indicate that Scheler did not make room in his phenomenological philosophy for non-being. Negation is either assumed in an affirmative way and built into the framework of his thought (evil, death), or else is totally overcome. Nothingness is overcome and gives way to the primary evidence (“something is”); death is part of the process of life or perhaps even a positively existing feature of life; and evil is also a *Wesen*, to which a *Dasein* must needs be assigned.

### 3. Non-Being within Being

How can non-being be included within being, on its own terms and without the

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can recognise through perception ... as well as all that I can will, choose, do and accomplish, depends on the play of this movement of the heart» (*Ordo Amoris*, SPE, p. 98 [X, p. 347]).

<sup>22</sup>In an interesting contemporary account, P. WUST, in *Max Schelers Lehre vom Menschen*, «Das neue Reich», 11 (1928-29), p. 138, termed Scheler’s encounter with Schelling’s essay on Freedom (around 1922, when he was trying to come to terms with the nature and origin of evil) a «fateful chance». He also included Scheler’s reading of the Gnostic Marcion among the factors impelling him towards this kind of solution. Scheler is more emphatic than Schelling in embracing, in his later, post-1923 philosophy, the notion of a “flawed” deity, for Schelling was torn, in that essay, between a privative and substantial theory of evil (cfr. F.W. SCHELLING, *On Human Freedom* (trans. J. Gutmann), Open Court, Chicago 1936, pp. 39-50 and 90).

<sup>23</sup>Cfr. *Schriften aus dem Nachlaß* III, XII, pp. 253-341.

<sup>24</sup>*Tod und Fortleben*, X, p. 24. Cfr. also *Versuch einer Philosophie des Lebens*, III, pp. 311-39. E. STRÖKER in *Der Tod im Denken Max Schelers*, in *Max Scheler im Gegenwartsgeschehen der Philosophie* (edited by P. Good), Francke, Berne 1975, p. 212, also notes this unusual depiction of death.

<sup>25</sup>Cfr. *Das Wesen des Todes*, XII, pp. 264, 266, 270.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 267.

<sup>27</sup>Cfr. *ibid.*, pp. 339-41.

sort of reconstruction in which Scheler engages? One of the most radical attempts to do so was that of Aristotle in his theory of potency. It is far beyond our scope here to give an account of that theory. But in his reply to the Parmenidean school and its univocal and uniform notion of being Aristotle was concerned to qualify the opposition to which the great Eleatic thinker had reduced our grasp of reality: the opposition of *contradiction*, that is, the *total* removal of being which leaves us with absolute non-being. In such a universe there is no place for variety or change. Being is one and the same, and the only other possibility is non-being.

How did Aristotle overcome this? Perhaps the clearest way to formulate it is to say that he included non-being within being: the relative non-being represented by otherness and by privation. Otherness or contrariety simply asserts that one thing is not another; privation adds a positive tendency or receptivity towards that other thing. In both cases there is an absence of being which permits us to understand the possibility of change or of the variety of types of reality around us. We do not have to deny the evidence of our common sense in order to believe in these things. It was facing non-being in this way which permitted Aristotle's great step forward. There is a type of "existential pluralism" involved<sup>28</sup>. This is a proceeding which is quite removed from the spirit of Scheler's philosophy. Non-being, as we noted, is a moment which is overcome, never to return. It does not play any such part in the subsequent development of his thought.

When Aristotle took up the Parmenidean problem he was addressing himself to a previous attempt to solve it, that of Plato in the *Sophist*<sup>29</sup>. In that dialogue the Eleatic Stranger tries to overcome the contradiction between Being and Non-being which was threatening to freeze philosophy. His solution is also a *relative* non-being. In a certain sense, he *will* say that non-being is and being is not<sup>30</sup>.

The Eleatic Stranger includes this "otherness" as one of the forms, alongside the form of Being and beneath the supreme form of Unity. So the *difference*, the relative non-being which he discovers is not truly part of being but in principle separate from it. It is something outside of beings which permits them to differ from one another.

At the foundation of this whole edifice there is the *One* in which being and all which shares in it participates. Ultimately this is why Plato says that it is not the essence of each form which differentiates it from the others, but something outside it - the form of the *other*. In the last analysis all forms are identical, for unity is the principle by which they are. «Each form, though a unity, is not *the* one but a reflection of the one in the Platonic material principle»<sup>31</sup>. The form of the Other is beyond Being.

Deep within this theory we find the conviction that self-identity is the root of each thing's being, and that the negative side of our experience is to be overcome in favour of identity. The same conviction is at work in Scheler's philosophy. Non-

<sup>28</sup> I have borrowed this phrase from W. STROZEWSKI's, *Transcendentals and Values*, «The New Scholasticism», 58 (1984), p. 192. Although it is used there in a slightly different context, I feel that it describes this matter very well indeed.

<sup>29</sup> For Aristotle's references to this dialogue, and to the "old-fashioned" method he claimed it contained, cf. *Metaphysics*, N, 2 1089a 1-32.

<sup>30</sup> Cfr. *Sophist*, 241-55.

<sup>31</sup> L. ESLICK, *The Dyadic Character of Being in Plato*, in *Readings in Ancient and Medieval Philosophy* (edited by J. Collins), Newman Press, Westminster 1963, pp. 50-51.



being, negations of any kind must be seen as facets of being, ultimately reducible to it. Real otherness is “beyond” being, and cannot find a place within it. The self-identity and irreducibility which the *Wesenschau* perceives and beholds in its object is always the final word, beyond which there can be—need be—no further appeal or criterion<sup>32</sup>. So the potential otherness which negations like evil and death represent had to be stripped of their negative quality in order to be assumed within Scheler’s thought.

This is reflected in Scheler’s consistent impatience with the “criterion” question in epistemology. «The criterion question is posed by the eternally “other”, the man who does not want to find the true and the false, or the values of good and evil, etc, by experiencing, by investigating the facts, but sets himself up as a judge over all these»<sup>33</sup>. He will not permit any logical or objective criterion to be brought to bear on the evidences of our intuition, whether to verify that it is achieving a truthful view of things or to offer an independent index of their findings. One cannot step outside of *Wesenschau*. Units of meaning, self-identities, are the very fibre of being, and the dialectic of ideas and words permits us to relate them to one another, but without tampering in any way with this prior note of self-identity. The Aristotelian system had overcome this self-identity: being may be relatively non-being and potency may strive towards act. The striving for completeness and finality is not a quality external to the “finished being,” and many beings are unfinished, they are «more than what they are»<sup>34</sup>.

Scheler’s thought, however, is haunted by self-identity. From the “essences” of his phenomenological thought, to the Absolute Substance which dominated his final years, the self-identity of being is the underlying theme which is played in differing keys. At first it is a logical exigency, for phenomenology develops as the unfolding of an idea; then in his later, transphenomenological philosophy it becomes the real purpose and principle driving the becoming of world, and ultimately of God, who realizes his identity and existence through the that of the world and in particular through the growing identity of man, the microcosm. Scheler knew that «[p]henomenology has its own poverty. It is constitutionally incapable of exploring questions of reality»<sup>35</sup>. His acute awareness of this poverty drove him to seek the mystery of existence in an absolute sphere beyond the phenomenology of essences, indeed beyond the realm of metaphysics.

<sup>32</sup> A. de MURALT, in *The Idea of Phenomenology*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston 1974, had claimed that Husserl’s phenomenology also views nonbeing as *otherness*: «Non-being is ultimately an other-being, not absolute nothingness. Here already we find an analogy with Plato» (pp. 18-19); and, consequently, that privations are reconstructed in order to be found within being: «For Husserl, there is only constituted being. Even the sense of non-being needs to be constituted in consciousness, and *as being*» (p. 282, fn.).

<sup>33</sup> *Phenomenology and the Theory of Cognition*, SPE, pp. 139-140 (X, p. 382). «Truth is the test of itself, and of error» (B. SPINOZA, *Letter to Albert Burgh*, quoted in *Spinoza*, speech delivered by Scheler in Amsterdam, February 1927 [IX, p. 173]).

<sup>34</sup> G. VERBEKE, *The Meaning of Potency in Aristotle*, in *Graceful Reason*, (edited by L. Gerson) Toronto 1983, p. 67.

<sup>35</sup> E. VACEK, *Scheler’s Evolving Methodologies*, «Analecta Husserliana», 22 (1987), p. 174.