

# Does philosophical knowledge presuppose a moral attitude? A discussion of Max Scheler's metaphilosophical thesis

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*Abstract:* This paper explores Max Scheler's metaphilosophical views. In particular, the paper seeks to reconstruct and assess Scheler's thesis according to which philosophical knowledge presupposes a moral attitude which he describes as an "act of upsurge" on the part of the whole person of the philosopher toward the essential, an act which cannot be found in either the natural worldview or the sciences. After motivating the topic in the introduction (section 1), the paper explores how Scheler approaches the question about the nature of philosophy by focusing on the type of person of the philosopher (section 2). It then examines Scheler's claim according to which philosophy is fundamentally distinct from the sciences (section 3), before exploring the moral attitude of the philosopher by examining three of its conditions: love, self-humbling, and self-mastery (section 4). The paper presents some challenges and objections against Scheler's metaphilosophical thesis. In particular, critiques of its metaphysical implications and of the view of science implicit in it are provided (section 5). Finally, it is also argued that the thesis contains a grain of truth and as such a moderate interpretation of it could be defended (section 6). The main findings are summarized in the conclusion (section 7).

*Keywords:* Max Scheler; phenomenological metaphilosophy; scientific attitude; essence; Platonism; metaphysics; love; humility; virtue.

## 1. *Introduction: Max Scheler's metaphilosophical thesis*

Since the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, metaphilosophy has developed into a field of philosophical inquiry concerned with questions regarding the aims, nature, methods, and values of philosophy itself (Cath 2011). Though it is not clear how metaphilosophy can be demarcated from other philosophical subdisciplines, there is general agreement that it approaches the old questions of philosophy – such as What is philosophy? What is its purpose? How should we philosophize? Is philosophy a science? – to reflect upon the activity of philosophizing itself. One of its aims consists of searching for the different answers that have been provided to such questions in the course of the history of philosophy. In this vein, there has been a growing interest in investigating the

metaphilosophical views defended by the most influential Western currents of thought of the last century. For instance, the entry “Metaphilosophy”, written by Joll (2017) for *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* examines metaphilosophy in pragmatism, analytic philosophy, and phenomenology. Moreover, publications on the metaphilosophical views of prominent authors in the history of philosophy have proliferated. To mention but a few, in recent years studies on Kant’s, Nietzsche’s or Wittgenstein’s metaphilosophies have appeared. The present paper is conceived against this background and aims at enlarging today’s metaphilosophical debate by exploring Max Scheler’s (1874–1928) metaphilosophical views. In particular, the paper reconstructs and assesses an intriguing idea which can be found in Scheler’s article “On the Essence of Philosophy and the Moral Condition of Philosophical Knowledge” (*Vom Wesen der Philosophie und die moralischen Bedingung des philosophischen Erkennens*, 1917). According to this idea, to which Scheler explicitly refers as a “thesis” (1954: 79; Eng. tr. 2010a: 85), philosophical knowledge presupposes a moral attitude which he, in quite Platonic terms, describes as an “act of upsurge” (*Akt des Aufschwungs*) of the whole person of the philosopher toward the essential, an act which cannot be found in either the natural worldview or the sciences.<sup>1</sup>

What are the motivations for writing a paper on Scheler’s metaphilosophy? To begin with, the existing literature on phenomenological views in metaphilosophy is devoted mainly to Husserl, to existentialist phenomenologists such as Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, and to later authors influenced by the phenomenological movement such as Derrida.<sup>2</sup> A focus on these major figures has led to a neglect of the metaphilosophical views of other, lesser known authors such as Scheler whose original insights are also worth acknowledging if we want to obtain a more complete picture of metaphilosophical views within phenomenology. Second, metaphilosophy has been dominated mainly by the question of the method or methods of philosophy,<sup>3</sup> often in combination with questions regarding the differences and similarities between philosophy and natural science. By contrast, other intriguing questions – such as the one posed by Scheler

<sup>1</sup> In this paper, I will indicate the page numbers of the original German as well as of the English translation. Though for quotations I will use the English translation, I have employed the original German for the reconstruction of Scheler’s thought.

<sup>2</sup> A good example of this focus on these authors is the above-mentioned entry “Metaphilosophy” written by Joll (2017). In their book, Overgaard *et al.* examine explicitly analytic philosophy and continental philosophy, the latter of which is often associated with phenomenology (2013).

<sup>3</sup> Cath (2011) argues that in the analytic tradition, metaphilosophy has focused mainly on questions of method. The same diagnosis can be made for metaphilosophy in the phenomenological tradition in which questions regarding the phenomenological method have been central too.

regarding a hypothetical moral attitude adopted by the philosopher in order to attain philosophical knowledge – have received scant attention. Finally, the very idea that philosophical knowledge requires a moral attitude is intriguing in itself. Whether or not we agree with Scheler’s specific understanding of this moral attitude, the question as such prompts us to think about the conditions of philosophizing and about the type of person we are as philosophers.

With the aim to present and discuss what I call here Scheler’s metaphilosophical thesis, I will adopt two methodological strategies. First, I will reconstruct Scheler’s thesis connecting his thoughts contained in the 1917 article mentioned above with other works of the same period. As noted by Schloßberger, Scheler is “a system thinker” (2020: 72). Therefore, the understanding of any specific systematic topic cannot be approached in isolation because in Scheler’s work, ethical, epistemological, and metaphysical issues are intertwined in multiple ways. In particular, as I will demonstrate below, Scheler’s metaphilosophical thesis is intimately linked to his philosophy of mind (and, specifically, his philosophy of affectivity), his ethics, and his metaphysics. Second, in order to assess his thesis, I will approach his work by focusing on three systematic questions: 1) the question about the nature of philosophy; 2) the question about the relation between philosophy and the sciences; and 3) the question about the moral conditions required to attain philosophical knowledge. Systematizing Scheler’s thoughts around these three issues will enable us to better understand the arguments that sustain his thesis and will also pave the way to assess its plausibility and potential for current research.

The structure of the paper will be as follows. After motivating the topic, the paper will first explore how Scheler approaches the question about the nature of philosophy by focusing on the philosopher as a type of person (section 2). It then examines Scheler’s claim according to which philosophy is fundamentally distinct from the sciences (section 3), before exploring the moral attitude of the philosopher by examining three of its conditions: love, self-humbling, and self-mastery (section 4). The paper presents some challenges and objections against Scheler’s metaphilosophical thesis. In particular, critiques of its metaphysical implications and of the view of science implicit in it are provided (section 5). Finally, it is also argued that the thesis contains a grain of truth and as such a moderate interpretation of it could be defended (section 6). The main findings are summarized in the conclusion (section 7).

## 2. *Defining philosophy by the philosopher’s spiritual attitude*

When Scheler approaches the question about the nature of philosophy in the aforementioned text of 1917, he notes that compared to the empirical sci-

ences (which he designates the “positive sciences”), philosophy cannot easily answer the question about what philosophy is. However, at the same time, Scheler considers the question about the nature of philosophy to be in fact a question of “philosophy’s self-knowledge through philosophy” (1954: 63; Eng. tr. 2010a: 70). That is, the question “what is philosophy?” is constitutive of philosophy itself.

In order to reconstruct his position, let me begin by sketching what in my view are, for Scheler, two problematic strategies that try to answer this question and define philosophy. The first such strategy is what I call the *conceptual approach*. He states that when we try to define what chemistry, physics or psychology are, we can always resort to a philosophical explanation of the main concepts of these disciplines such as matter, energy, consciousness or life. By contrast, philosophy, which, according to Scheler, constitutes itself through the question about its nature, cannot be defined by resorting to a philosophical explanation of its main concepts. Any attempt to define philosophy employing this approach would entail a circular argument because to know whether or not a content is philosophical presupposes that we already have an idea about what philosophy is and what is its object. In addition, in philosophy, we do not have a fixed doctrine or a system to which we can resort in order to answer this question. A second strategy which he finds inappropriate is what I call the *historical approach* which involves consulting the history of the discipline itself. This would presuppose that we already have an idea about the essence of what different authors at different times have called “philosophy”. Though these strategies might be useful to find out the nature of other disciplines, they are useless when it comes to elaborating a definition of philosophy.

According to Scheler, the question about the nature of philosophy has to take as its point of departure the *autonomy* of philosophy. That philosophy is autonomous means that it cannot presuppose as true knowledge of its history, knowledge of the natural sciences, knowledge of the natural worldview or knowledge obtained through revelation. Philosophical knowledge is, for Scheler, the most unconditional form of knowledge. Thus, any attempt to define philosophy by resorting to knowledge of other disciplines would imply a form of traditionalism, scientificism, fideism, or dogmatism.

Having rejected conceptual and historical approaches and determined the autonomous character of philosophical knowledge, Scheler suggests answering the question about the nature of philosophy by looking at the philosopher as a “type of person” (Personentypus) (1954: 64; Eng. tr. 2010a: 70). I want to call this the *person’s type approach*. This approach is valid only for autonomous disciplines (in the sense mentioned above). According to Scheler, it is false to think that it is easier to delimit a “subject matter” or a “task” than to indicate

or to recognize the “type of person” who possesses competences for such matters and tasks. Thus, although there is a general skepticism toward defining art as what the true artist makes, religion as what the true saint experiences, and philosophy as the relation to things exhibited by the true philosopher, Scheler thinks that at least as a heuristic tool we can determine a subject matter by examining the type of person who possesses competences for it.

That said, Scheler observes that when we decide whether a person such as Plato, Aristotle or Descartes is a “true” philosopher, there must be an idea that guides us in taking this decision. For Scheler, this guiding idea upon which it seems to be a certain implicit agreement but whose content is not always clear to us is not an empirical concept. In fact, this idea is about a fundamental spiritual attitude (*geistige Grundhaltung*) toward things that is characteristic of the personality of the philosopher. For Scheler, this idea which is still hidden is what guides us when we decide whether or not a person is a philosopher.

In Scheler’s view, by focusing on the type of person of the philosopher and her spiritual fundamental attitude toward things, we can find out the nature of the object of philosophy itself. Against the widespread view that philosophy does not have its own objects and that it studies the same objects as the sciences but from another point of view, Scheler argues that philosophy does indeed have its own subject area (*Sachgebiet*), world of objects (*Gegenstandswelt*) or world of facts (*Welt von Tatsachen*) (1954: 65-66; Eng. tr. 2010a: 71-72). Although these facts exist independently of us, they are accessible only through a specific spiritual attitude. Thus, to determine what is the object of philosophy and what we can know about it, it is first necessary to examine the philosophical spiritual attitude that we have in mind when we claim that a person X is a philosopher.

What is this spiritual attitude? For Scheler, ancient philosophers discovered that the object of philosophy is in a particular realm of *being* (*Reiche des Seins*) (1954: 67; Eng. tr. 2010a: 73). They discovered that contact with this realm of being is linked to a specific act (*Aktus*) in which the whole personality is involved and which is missing from the natural attitude. This act was for the ancient philosophers an act of moral nature since it presupposes that we overcome a hindrance common to the natural attitude that prevents us from entering into contact with the being of philosophy. In Scheler’s view, this act was already described by Plato as a “movement of the soul’s wings” and as an “act of upsurge” (*Akt des Aufschwungs*) (1954: 67; Eng. tr. 2010a: 73) of the whole person toward the essential of all possible things. The essential is not a special object that exists beside the empirical objects; rather it is the essential in all possible things. This *dynamis* at the core of the person was described as an “eros”, i.e., as a tendency or movement of all incomplete beings toward a complete being.

Though Scheler does not adopt the entire platonic doctrine, he takes from Plato two ideas regarding the fundamental spiritual attitude necessary for philosophy. First, Scheler adopts from Plato the idea that it is an act of the core of the person that puts us in contact with the object of philosophy. This act cannot be found in the natural worldview (*natürliche Weltanschauung*) nor in the empirical sciences which are founded on such a view. The second idea that Scheler takes from Plato is that this act is founded on a specific kind of love. For Scheler, philosophy underlies “a love-determined movement of the inmost personal Self of a finite being toward participation in the essential reality of all possibles” (1954: 68; Eng. tr. 2010a: 74). This means that a human being of the type of the “philosopher” is a human being who is able to adopt this attitude toward the world.

Yet, for Scheler, the spiritual philosophical attitude is not exhausted in these two moments. To them must be added a third moment according to which philosophy is knowing and the philosopher is one who knows. It should be stressed here that Scheler’s notion of knowledge is more far-reaching than the usual understanding of knowledge in terms of justified true belief. More specifically, Scheler calls knowledge the participation of a finite human being in essential reality. This view of knowledge is not only defended in this text, but permeates Scheler’s philosophical production (see, for instance, “*Erkenntnis und Arbeit*” (Knowledge and work) 1960: 227).<sup>4</sup> Accordingly, Scheler understands philosophy as an a priori self-evident intuition of essences and of essential interrelations of being (1954: 98; Eng. tr. 2010a: 104). These essences are not just the result of applying the phenomenological method as in Husserl; rather they constitute a realm of facts which can be disclosed if we adopt a specific spiritual attitude toward them.<sup>5</sup> They are not subordinated to empirical reality or to thought; they transcend us.<sup>6</sup> This is the world of objects of philosophical knowledge which, according to him, can be approached by focusing on the philosopher’s spiritual attitude.

Before highlighting the main features of this spiritual attitude in comparison to the attitudes we have in the natural worldview and in the sciences, and before determining its specific moral conditions, let us step back for a moment

<sup>4</sup> In “*Erkenntnis und Arbeit*”, Scheler distinguishes between different forms of knowledge in more detail (283). For an analysis of the relation between these different forms of knowledge and love, see Vendrell Ferran 2015.

<sup>5</sup> Scheler here takes for granted the idea that we have a priori knowledge about different domains of reality. For the idea of a priori knowledge in realist phenomenology, see Smith 1997, and for Scheler’s specific development of this idea, see Kelly 2012.

<sup>6</sup> For the idea that phenomenology discloses a realm of facts in Scheler, see Meyer 1987: 21 and Mohr 2012: 229.

and consider Scheler's approach from the perspective of current metaphilosophy. As the above reconstruction of Scheler's approach shows, his proposal is to define philosophy by examining the person-type of the philosopher. Yet, as we have seen, in Scheler's work, his approach to the question of the nature of philosophy is intimately linked to what can be called an "essentialist" position.<sup>7</sup> His essentialism can be stated in at least two different respects. First, he takes as a point of departure the idea that all activities called "philosophy" have something in common, i.e., there is something that can be called the "essence" (Wesen) of philosophy. This idea is reflected clearly in the German title of the essay which contains the word "Wesen", i.e., "essence" (in the English version, "Wesen" is translated as "Nature"). As a result, though he proposes, as a heuristic tool, that we approach the realm of objects of philosophy by focusing on the type of person of the philosopher, he is not advocating for a deflationist position according to which philosophy is just what people called philosophers do. It is not his aim to answer the question about the nature of philosophy empirically, observing what people called philosophers have de facto in common. Rather, he approaches the question by looking at the idea that guides us when we claim that someone is a philosopher. This idea is for him a spiritual attitude toward the world. It is worth noting that Scheler's approach is both descriptive and normative. He not only describes the spiritual attitude that guides us when we call someone a philosopher, but also regards this attitude as the attitude that philosophers must exhibit.

Second, Scheler is also an "essentialist" regarding the objects of philosophical scrutiny. This issue is important here because in general philosophers do not agree about what exactly they study. Unlike history and psychology (and other disciplines such as biology, zoology, astronomy, physics, etc.) which have clearly delimited research fields, the question about what philosophy studies has been the topic of significant controversy. At one extreme there are those who do not know what exactly is the object of philosophy, while at the opposite extreme there are those who claim that the question is irrelevant, and in between them lie a wide and variegated range of positions about what is the object of philosophical scrutiny (for an overview, see Overgaard *et al.* 2013: 2-ff.). Against this backdrop, Scheler claims that philosophy has its own world of objects to which he refers as the essential of all possible things. Indeed, for Scheler, philosophy is the intuition of essences. As we will see in the next section, it is precisely because philosophy deals with essences that it requires a moral spiritual attitude which is absent from the natural worldview and science. Yet, these essences, as Scheler himself states in the third "Preface" to

<sup>7</sup> For essentialist and deflationist positions in metaphilosophy, see Overgaard *et al.* 2013.



his *Formalism* book, are not like Platonic ideas. Rather, as he writes: “I reject, in principle and at the very threshold of philosophy, a heavenly realm of ideas and values that is ‘independent’ of the essence and execution of living spiritual acts, independent not only with regard to man and human consciousness but also with regard to the essence and execution of a living spirit in general” (1973a: XXX). In short, Scheler’s essences are not completely independent of the beings who are capable of grasping them.

### 3. *The natural worldview and the distinction between the philosopher’s and the scientist’s attitudes*

As described above, in order to attain philosophical knowledge, we have to adopt a moral attitude and overcome certain barriers that we encounter in the natural attitude that hinder us from entering into contact with the realm of objects of philosophy. Since for Scheler, science too implies a change in attitude regarding our natural worldview wherein we are immersed in our dealings with the environment, in which we take our environment to be “the world”, and in which we are focused on the region of being relative to the sphere of vitality, a comparison between the philosophical and the scientific attitudes is required. Indeed, as we will see, the changes in attitude presupposed by philosophy on the one hand, and the sciences on the other, differ in substantial respects. In other words, for Scheler, philosophy is fundamentally distinct from the sciences, a term that he deliberately employs in the plural.

To start with, some historical remarks are in order. What we today call “science” emerged gradually out of philosophy during the Renaissance and early Modernity. During this time, issues which were regarded as typically philosophical became the subject matter of the new disciplines of physics, chemistry, biology, etc. This development robustly questioned the function of philosophy with respect to the sciences and left the door open to different interpretations of the relation between the two. It is in the context of these different interpretations that Scheler discusses in his text four positions: philosophy as the queen of the sciences; philosophy as the servant of the sciences; philosophy as itself a science; and finally, philosophy as distinct from science, which is the position with which he aligns himself.

Scheler argues first that the ancient idea that philosophy is autonomous and as such distinct from science – an idea which was best exemplified in the view of philosophy as “the queen of the sciences” (*regina scientiarum*) – developed into the opposite view according to which philosophy is “the handmaiden of the sciences” (*ancilla scientiarum*). According to this latter view, the main function of philosophy is to unify the results of the sciences (as is the case



for positivism) or to examine their conditions and methods (as it is the case for the scientific philosophy). However, for Scheler this view and the development that led to it are based on an “overthrow of all order of values” (Umsturz aller Wertordnung) (1954: 74; Eng. tr. 2010a: 79). This idea of an inversion of values that we find in this 1917 text was already employed by Scheler some years earlier in his essay on *Ressentiment* written in 1912 (2010b), in which he argues that when the desired goals cannot be achieved, a distorted apprehension of values and their hierarchy ensues. Genuine values and their bearers are then degraded, and this devaluation leads to genuine values being replaced by illusory ones. The distortion of the heart consists precisely in this inversion of values and this replacement. According to my reading, though not mentioning this emotional attitude in the 1917 text, Scheler is appealing to the structure of *Ressentiment* when he refers to an inversion of values. In particular, he is resorting to his critique of modernity, and its moral subjectivism, egalitarianism, and the negation of high values and how modernity involves an inversion of values according to which the useful appears to be the most important of all values.

That said, the view that philosophy is a form of science is also unacceptable to Scheler. In this respect, his views differ substantially from Husserl’s well-known claim defended in his *Logos* article “Philosophy as Rigorous Science” (1911) that philosophy should be a rigorous science. Husserl seems to have maintained this view at least until the *Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* (1936). While a thorough comparison of Husserl’s and Scheler’s views would deserve an article of its own, in what follows let me sketch the main points of convergence and divergence between the two authors.

Scheler himself exhibits some similarities with Husserl. First, like Husserl, Scheler distinguishes self-evident knowledge of essences (Wesenserkenntnis) from positive knowledge (Realerkenntnis). In addition, Scheler also argues that while positive knowledge remains in the sphere of probability, “philosophy is self-evident knowledge of essences” (1954: 75; Eng. tr. 2010a: 80). Third, like Husserl, Scheler also distinguishes philosophy from the deductive sciences of “ideal objects” (mathematics, logics, and theory of numbers).<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Scheler states that Husserl expresses higher esteem for the phenomenology of the act and the phenomenology of the psychic than for the phenomenology of distinct regions of being (e.g., the phenomenology of nature) and confesses to find this preference unwarranted. This observation is important in the light of Husserl’s turn toward transcendental philosophy and his interest in the constitutive activities of consciousness which is in contrast to realist phenomenology which was more interested in the analysis of the regions of being (for both directions within the phenomenological movement, see Geiger 1933).

Yet, despite these points of agreement, there are profound differences between the two authors. These differences are terminological as well as substantial.<sup>9</sup> The first disagreement concerns the use of the term “science”. According to Scheler, Husserl employs this term with two different meanings: one for philosophy as self-evident knowledge of essences (what Husserl calls “rigorous science”); the other for the positive formal sciences of ideal objects and the empirical sciences. In contrast to Husserl, Scheler prefers to reserve the term for the latter meaning, employing for the former the term “philosophy” (Scheler 1954: 75; 2010a: 81). Therefore, though the German word for science, “Wissenschaft”, can be employed to refer to the natural as well as the human sciences, Scheler prefers to use the term for the natural (e.g., biology) and formal sciences (e.g., mathematics), and to concede philosophy a place of its own. As he puts it, philosophy is nothing but philosophy and, as such, it possesses its own idea of strictness and of its discipline, and philosophy need not be ruled by any ideal notion of scientific discipline.

A second relevant difference between Scheler and Husserl concerns the words “Weltanschauung” and “Weltanschauungsphilosophie”. The term “Weltanschauung”, which in English translations is often quoted in German and means something like “vision of life” or “worldview”, is employed by Scheler (who on this point follows von Humboldt) to refer to the forms of apprehending and envisaging the world which prevail at a given time over a given area as well as the structure of given intuitions and values of various social units such as peoples, nations, and civilizations. One finds these “Weltanschauungen” in the syntax of languages, religions, and ethos. The “Weltanschauungsphilosophie” is for Scheler the philosophy which is a natural constant for the human being. By contrast, Husserl employs the term “Weltanschauungsphilosophie” for what Scheler calls “scientific philosophy”, i.e., the attempt made within the frame of positivism to develop a metaphysics or “Weltanschauung” that takes the results of science as its point of departure. Scheler agrees with Husserl that “scientific philosophy” is absurd. However, he does not agree with Husserl in calling the “scientific philosophy” a “Weltanschauungsphilosophie” because for Scheler, “Weltanschauungen” “evolve and grow”; they are not thought up by scholars (1954: 77; Eng. tr. 2010a: 83).

Scheler also agrees with Husserl that philosophy itself cannot be a “Weltanschauung”, but at most only a doctrine of “Weltanschauungen” (Weltanschauungslehre). He agrees with the idea that creating a doctrine of particular

<sup>9</sup> Some of the disagreements between Husserl and Scheler mentioned here have already been noted by Mohr 2012. Here I complement and extend his work providing an analysis of Scheler’s main motivations for the claim that philosophy is distinct from the sciences.

“Weltanschauungen” (such as the Christian or Indian worldview) is not the main task of philosophy. However, for Scheler, there is a philosophy of “natural Weltanschauungen”. This “Weltanschauungslehre” would be, with the help of phenomenology, able to assess the cognitive value of “Weltanschauungen”. It would also show that the structures of the prevailing “Weltanschauungen” occasion and influence the structure, character, and level of science effective in a society at a given time and would show that any variation in the structure of science is preceded by an analogous variation in the “Weltanschauung”. Thus, while Husserl tends to give the positive sciences a greater factual independence from the changing “Weltanschauungen”, Scheler considers the sciences to be dependent on prevailing “Weltanschauungen”. In fact, for Scheler, the structures of science, their factual systems of fundamental concepts and principles always take place within the given structures of a “Weltanschauung”.

As mentioned above, a complete understanding of the analogies and differences between Scheler and Husserl regarding the relation between philosophy and science/the sciences, despite its historical interest, is beyond the scope of this paper. Here my aim is rather to shed light on the reasons why Scheler, unlike Husserl, regards philosophy as fundamentally distinct from the sciences. To this end, I will focus on what I take to be the main four criteria motivating Scheler’s view of a fundamental distinction between philosophy and the sciences.

### 3.1. Objects and their mode of givenness

The first criterion concerns the objects studied by philosophy and science. These disciplines’ objects are, for Scheler, of a different kind. According to Scheler, philosophy has its own objects which cannot be reduced to the objects which occupy us in the natural attitude or in the sciences. This view was stated already in his article “The Theory of Three Facts” written between 1911 and 1912, where he distinguishes three kinds of facts: facts given in the common-sense experience of the natural worldview; facts which are studied in the natural sciences; and phenomenological facts which are revealed in the eidetic intuition (Scheler 1973b: 215).<sup>10</sup>

Moreover, science works with an “artificial” worldview and deals with states of affairs gained through observation (1973b: 226). The objects’ different forms of existence result in different forms of givenness in the sciences. For instance, natural sciences require an extraverted attitude, while psychology requires an introverted attitude (1954: 84; Eng. tr. 2010a: 90). By contrast, these variegated forms of givenness cannot be found in philosophy. The mode of givenness in philosophy is intuition.

<sup>10</sup> For an analysis of this point, see Schutz 1957: 307.

Furthermore, unlike philosophy, which is intuition of essences and essential connections, science moves in the sphere of contingency. Even if science seeks universal laws of nature and presupposes knowledge of essences, it is unable to provide such knowledge.

### 3.2. Abilities

The second criterion which, according to my reading, motivates Scheler's distinction between philosophy and the sciences concerns the abilities involved in both activities. By virtue of the nature of their respective objects (numbers, geometrical figures, plants, animals, etc.), the sciences require the exercise of partial abilities of the human being. What Scheler means by this is that some sciences require more observation while others more reasoning; some sciences are more deductive while others are more intuitive, etc. While in the sciences only a part of the person of the scientist is involved, philosophy requires the involvement of the whole human being. Even when the philosopher approaches a specific question, in philosophy, it is the whole person of the philosopher who is involved in this activity (Scheler 1954: 84; 2010a: 90). An important consequence of these differences regarding the involvement of our abilities in the realization of a task is that for Scheler, while philosophy is one, the sciences are many.

### 3.3. Values, goods, and aims

Let us turn to what I consider to be a third criterion behind Scheler's distinction. This criterion concerns the values, goods, and aims of philosophy on the one hand, and the sciences on the other. As a follow up of the second criterion, those disciplines that are linked to certain types of values and types of goods such as art, law, politics, etc. require a one-sided application and exercise of emotional functions. For instance, art requires a sense for qualities, legal sciences require a feeling for what is fair, just, etc. By contrast, in philosophy, even when it deals with very specific problems, it is the whole human being who philosophizes and not only her reason or her sensibility. For Scheler, this thesis, which can also be found in Plato, is not a psychological thesis, but an ontical one (1954: 84-85; Eng. tr. 2010a: 90).

Furthermore, and this is a central point for Scheler, the scientist is moved by practical aims. Her goals are the "control and modification" of the surrounding world (*Beherrschbarkeit und Veränderlichkeit*) (1954: 91; Eng. tr. 2010a: 97). Unlike the scientist, the philosopher controls and modifies only insofar as this enables her to enter into contact with a sphere of absolute being. Thus, though both exhibit the same attitude of "self-mastery", this activity is employed with different aims.

### 3.4. Moral or non-moral nature of the activities

Finally, philosophy and the sciences differ regarding their moral or non-moral nature. Scheler argues that though both philosophy and the sciences presuppose an attitude which differs from the natural attitude, it is philosophy but not science that requires a moral attitude that makes us transcend the natural worldview and puts us in contact with essences. Philosophy requires an act of upsurge that puts us in contact with a different realm of being. In this context, Scheler defends the radical view that the goal of the human being in the upsurge is to create a unity of her being with the being of the essential and, in so doing, to transcend herself. As I will elaborate below, this moral attitude is only possible because the philosopher is moved by love.

Though science too requires an attitude which differs from the natural worldview, the attitude required by science is not moral because the scientist does not aim at entering into contact with essences.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, though the contents of science are different from those we target in the natural attitude, in its formal structure science remains based in the natural attitude (1954: 89; 2010a: 94). In fact, the scientist must love knowledge, but unlike the philosopher, she must not love the being of things.

These fundamental differences between philosophy and the sciences are based on the idea that philosophy deals with a region of objects which is beyond the reach not only of the natural attitude but also of the empirical and formal sciences. A view of this sort can be regarded as a form of “Platonism”.<sup>12</sup> As described by Overgaard *et al.*, “Platonism” is the view that philosophy deals with a “deep” and intangible part of reality beyond the reach of the sciences (2013: 32). In Plato’s allegory of the cave formulated in his *Republic*, while the empirical sciences study the world of shadows, the philosopher accesses the region of the intelligible and is able to contemplate the true forms of the beauty, the good, etc. Though Scheler rejects the idea of an independent realm of ideas and values, for him philosophy and the sciences deal with different regions of objects, access to which requires different attitudes. Moreover, the objects of philosophy, which Scheler regards as a realm of the essential, seem to be placed at a more elevated region than the objects of the sciences. Precisely for this reason, for him, the idea of philosophy as “*ancilla scientiarum*” is the expression of an inversion of values.

<sup>11</sup> Note that Scheler’s view is compatible with the idea that scientific praxis can be guided by moral principles.

<sup>12</sup> Scheler’s Platonism differs from Husserl’s Platonism in one crucial respect. While Husserl argues that philosophy should be a rigorous science, Scheler, like Plato, places the sciences at a different level than philosophy. For a comparative analysis of Husserl’s and Plato’s views of the relation between philosophy and the sciences, see Arnold 2018, 35 and ff.

#### 4. *Characterizing the philosopher's spiritual attitude in terms of moral conditions*

##### 4.1. The Primacy of Love Over Practical and Theoretical Reason

This section delves deeper into Scheler's idea about a moral condition for philosophical knowledge. In what sense does the spiritual attitude of the philosopher have a moral character?

Scheler warns us not to conflate his claim that philosophy requires a moral condition with Kant's and Fichte's idea of a "primacy of practical over theoretical reason" (*Primat der praktischen Vernunft vor der theoretischen*) (1954: 78; Eng. tr. 2010a: 84). Scheler's moral condition should not be interpreted in terms of a practical attitude toward the world because this attitude is for Scheler linked to the natural attitude and as such it can be deceptive. In this respect, Scheler regards his account as being closer (though not entirely identical) to the views defended by the ancient philosophers for whom a moral spiritual attitude (the act of upsurge) is necessary to obtain philosophical knowledge, i.e., for entering into contact with the realm of being which is the object of philosophy. Yet, unlike the ancients for whom the theoretical life was regarded as more valuable than the practical one, Scheler does not argue for a "primacy of theoretical reason". In fact, what Scheler defends is what he himself calls a "primacy of love".

Scheler's argument for the claim that philosophical knowledge presupposes a moral condition presumes a certain familiarity with theses defended in his other works of that period. In what follows, resorting to his epistemology, philosophy of affectivity, ethics, and metaphysics, I will shed light on the three main tenets of his argument. To this end, I will proceed in three steps.

First, Scheler starts by showing that we must become aware of the motives of self-deception that may misguide us in the apprehension of value. In this vein, he claims that "authority and education" (*Autorität und Erziehung*) are required to achieve an intuition of value (and the will and action founded on it) (1954: 79; Eng. tr. 2010a: 85). To acquire the ability to see what is right and good, one must overcome the motives for self-deception which precede the intuition of values and which are responsible for deceiving us about values and for making us blind to them. The motives for self-deception that Scheler mentions in the paper on the essence of philosophy are forms of life which consist mainly in objective bad will and action turned habitual for us. Scheler highlights these self-deceptive forms in order to demonstrate that the apprehension of value requires a moral condition. Yet, these are for Scheler by no means the only sources of self-deception. Though he does not develop the is-

sue here, in his essay on the “Idols of Self-knowledge” written in 1911 (1973c), Scheler makes clear that we have a natural tendency to take what is given in our environment as if it were our own. This involves other forms of self-deception than those mentioned in the 1917 text. For instance, we might think and even have the emotional illusion that we are sad because we are attending a funeral, without in fact being sad about it. For Scheler, these self-deceptive tendencies need to be clear to us so that we can apprehend values without falling victim to self-deceptive maneuvers. As the example illustrates, there are forms of self-deception about values that are formed in a pre-volitional sphere, i.e., before actions, and that are capable of conditioning the will, action, and emotional experience.<sup>13</sup>

One might ask here why Scheler speaks of a moral condition for the apprehension of values when he in fact wants to demonstrate that what requires a moral condition is philosophical knowledge, a knowledge that he interprets as the cognition of being. Indeed, Scheler makes clear that the cognition of values presupposes a moral condition, but he wants to show that the cognition of being presupposes a moral condition too. To this end, in the next step of his argument, he shows that there is an essential connection between the cognition of value and the cognition of being. For him, no value-free being can be the object of a perception, memory, expectation, thought or judgment. In fact, there is a logical (not temporal) order of foundation according to which an apprehension of value precedes the apprehension of things. A being which is value-free or value-indifferent is for Scheler the result of an artificial abstraction. In fact, as Scheler stated in his work *The Nature of Sympathy* (2008), first published in 1913, we are emotionally involved with things and only come to regard them as value-free via an abstraction.<sup>14</sup> In his view, the consciousness of values precedes the consciousness of things. Scheler also endorses this strong thesis in his *Formalism*, where he clearly states: “A value precedes its object: it is the first ‘messenger’ of its particular nature” (1973a: 18). Again, the apprehension of values (a phenomenon that he calls “value-ception”) “precedes all representational acts according to an essential law of its origins” (1973a: 201). In short, for Scheler, values are given to us prior to the entities which are their bearers.

So far, according to Scheler’s argument, the givenness of values is prior to the givenness of being (though values are only attributes of being) and since the givenness of values presupposes a moral condition, then the givenness of

<sup>13</sup> For an analysis of the biosemiotics aspects of Scheler’s thought, see Cusinato 2018.

<sup>14</sup> This idea reappears in the 1917 essay when, for instance, he argues that the Pitagorean treated numbers as if they were deities before analyzing them.



being also (indirectly) presupposes it. Yet, how does Scheler end up defending here a “primacy of love”? To understand this next step of his argument, it is important to know that for Scheler values are given in affective acts. This thesis is stated in several works of the period from 1910 to 1920. Scheler regards love as the most primary of all acts and the one that makes us open to the world of values and being. Thus, for him, before something is known, it must be first loved or hated: “Everywhere the ‘amateur’ precedes the ‘savant’” (1954: 81; Eng. tr. 2010a: 86). Or as he puts it in “Ordo amoris”: “Man, before he is an *ens cogitans* or an *ens volens*, is an *ens amans*” (1973d: 110-111). Therefore, given that for Scheler values are given in affective acts and that among all affective acts those responsible for disclosing values are acts of love, he argues here for a “primacy of love”. Now we can understand how Scheler’s “primacy of love” is distinct from Kant’s and Fichte’s thesis of a “primacy of practical over theoretical reason” as well as from the ancient thesis of a “primacy of reason over practical life” (although, as he himself acknowledges, his view is closer to the latter than to the former because, like Plato, he argues that there is a moral condition of philosophical knowledge).

Let me stress here that for Scheler love is not an emotion but an attitude of openness of the human being toward the world. As he puts it in his *Formalism*, love is a primordial act or basic attitude that forms the core of our personality and enables our access to the world of values: “Love and hate are acts in which the value-realm accessible to the feeling of a being [...] is either extended or narrowed [...]” (1973a: 261). While emotions are, in Scheler’s view, responses to values (for instance, fear is a response to an object presented as dangerous), love is not a response but a form of being open toward the other and her positive higher values. In this respect, Scheler’s love has a disclosive nature.

#### 4.2. The Moral Act of Upsurge: Love, Self-humbling, and Self-mastery

Having explained Scheler’s main argument for the moral condition of philosophical knowledge, let’s turn to his particular understanding of the “moral act of upsurge” which puts us in contact with the realm of being that is the object of philosophical knowledge. As mentioned in section 3, this act presupposes that we overcome certain barriers and inhibitions which are typical of the natural attitude whereby we are immersed in our environment and consider things only insofar as they are relevant for our vital purposes. In this act of moral upsurge, Scheler identifies three acts which must work together in unitary interaction (Scheler 1954: 89-90; Eng. tr. 2010a: 95). From these three acts, only the first is of a positive nature, while the second and third are of a negative character because in them we have to refrain from tendencies inherent to our being. For Scheler, *only these three moral acts* enable the human be-

ing to participate in the sphere of absolute being and to overcome the natural egocentrism (natürlichen Egozentrismus), vitalism, and anthropomorphism (1954: 90; 2010a: 95) which are typical of the natural worldview. Each one of these acts can be regarded as a moral condition for philosophical knowledge:

1. Love of the whole spiritual person toward absolute value and being. This love breaks the source of the relativity of being and leads us in the direction of absolute being. As stated above, for Scheler, love is a form of openness toward higher values and as such it has a disclosive function. Moreover, it is more basic than cognition and will. He regards this love as the motor of the entire complex of acts.
2. Self-humbling (Verdemütigung) of the natural self and I. According to Scheler this act breaks the natural pride (Stolz) and leads us from the contingent existence of something toward its essence.
3. Self-mastery (Selbstbeherrschung) and objectification of the instinctual impulses of life which are given as “bodily” and experienced as founded on the body, and which condition the natural sensory perception. This act overcomes the natural concupiscence and leads us from an inadequate perception of objects to adequate intuitive knowledge. For Scheler, self-mastery is the only activity shared by the philosopher and the scientist. Yet, while the scientist employs it to control and change the world, for the philosopher self-mastery enables the act of self-humbling.

It is important to note, as Schutz has done (1957: 306), that Scheler is speaking of a spiritual moral attitude and not of a technique or a method. The “true” philosopher is not a technician, but a type of person who is able of love, to become humbled, and to achieve self-mastery in order to transcend the natural attitude with the aim to discover a realm of philosophical facts.

Moreover, let me stress that for Scheler, these three acts do not just have an epistemic function, but also serve to open us toward the sphere of absolute being. Therefore, Scheler finishes his investigation by stating that inquiry into the nature of philosophy must begin with the question of the order of fundamental self-evident insights. And, for him, the first self-evident insight is that “there is something”, or put otherwise “there is not nothing”. The second insight is that there is an absolute entity, i.e., an entity which is not dependent on other entities. The third insight is that every possible entity must necessarily possess an essence and an existence. Therefore, the philosopher’s spiritual attitude is not just an epistemic attitude that enables us to attain philosophical knowledge. Rather, it is an attitude of openness toward the sphere of absolute being.

In the light of these last reflections, it can be said that Scheler’s metaphysical thesis is in fact a metaphysical thesis about how finite being comes to participate in essential reality (as stated in section 1, he defines knowledge

precisely in terms of participation). This result might seem radical, but it is interesting in two key respects. First, if we take as a point of departure the idea already noted by some Scheler scholars such as Meyer (1987) and, more recently, Mohr (2012) that Scheler's philosophy is imbued by metaphysical assumptions, it is not surprising that his metaphilosophy is in fact a version of his metaphysics. Second, this result is particularly interesting in the light of a strong thesis presented by Geldsetzer in the 1970s according to which metaphilosophy is in fact another name for metaphysics (Geldsetzer 1974: 255). Though I think we should not hurry to adopt Geldsetzer's radical view, the results of this section should invite us to rethink the relation between both philosophical subdisciplines.

##### 5. *Challenges and objections against Scheler's metaphilosophical thesis*

So far, I have reconstructed and discussed Scheler's metaphilosophical thesis according to which philosophical knowledge presupposes a moral attitude. More specifically, I have shown that for Scheler love, self-humbling, and self-mastery are the three moral preconditions that enable us to overcome certain tendencies inherent to the natural attitude so that we can enter into contact with a world of essences which is the object of philosophical knowledge. In this section, my aim is to assess the plausibility of this thesis and to evaluate its potential for current research. To this end, I will present a series of challenges and possible objections against his view.

The first series of objections against Scheler's thesis concerns his essentialism, i.e., the view that all activities we call philosophy have something in common which he describes as an act of upsurge in the direction of a realm of essences. Scheler's essentialism is problematic because it leaves aside many other conceptions of philosophy present in Western and non-Western thought which do not work with the idea that philosophy is a form of intuition or that it has to do with essences. Moreover, the notion of "essence" central to phenomenology has been subjected to strong criticism from other currents of thought. As shown by Overgaard (2010: 902), Ryle already attacked Husserl for investigating "super-objects" called "essences". This attack is the result of a tendency to interpret the notion of essence as independent of the beings able to apprehend them. However, as I mentioned above, Scheler explicitly rejects the view of a "heavenly realm of ideas".

Second, when Scheler describes the attitude necessary to attain philosophical knowledge, he seems to describe phenomenology itself. In fact, in "Phenomenology and the Theory of Cognition" written between 1913 and 1914, Scheler argues that one of the central aspects of the group of thinkers called

phenomenologists is that they are inspired by a common attitude (*Einstellung*). As he puts it: “phenomenology is neither the name of a new science nor a substitute for the word ‘philosophy’; it is the name of an attitude of spiritual seeing in which one can see (*er-schauen*) or experience (*er-leben*) something which otherwise remains hidden, namely, a realm of facts of a particular kind. I say ‘attitude,’ not ‘method’” (1973e: 137). While a method is a procedure of “thinking about facts”, in phenomenology it is a matter of “new facts themselves” and of a procedure of “seeing”. Though Scheler insists that phenomenology is not a new name for philosophy, in fact, his understanding of philosophy is very close to what he calls phenomenology. A problematic consequence of this view is that what he regards as “true” philosophers are either phenomenologists who adopt the phenomenological attitude or authors working close to the standards of the phenomenological attitude. In this view, philosophers working with other understandings of philosophy would not be “true” philosophers.

Third, Scheler’s views of philosophy and the sciences can be challenged in the following three respects. To begin, as we have seen, he defends a version of Platonism and considers philosophy as being occupied with a deeper and more elevated dimension of reality than science (Overgaard *et al.* 2013: 33). This view does not interpret science and philosophy at the same level, but rather sees them in a hierarchical relation in which philosophy stays above science. For Scheler, this hierarchy is based on the kind of objects studied by each of these disciplines: essences are deeper than states of affairs gained via observation. However, if we take a different perspective, for instance, the point of view of the consequences, Scheler’s thesis can be strongly challenged because science’s capacity to improve our life, at least from this vantage-point, is “higher” than philosophy’s capacity. It is science, not philosophy, that cures disease, takes us to Mars, enables us to explore micro and macrocosmic worlds, etc.

Moreover, Scheler’s thesis presupposes that philosophy is an “armchair” discipline distant from empirical concerns. However, philosophical knowledge can be informed, motivated, corrected or molded by looking into the results of the empirical disciplines and, conversely, philosophical views might influence, correct, mold or motivate empirical research.

Furthermore, Scheler’s idea that philosophy and the sciences share only the attitude that he calls “self-mastery” is controversial. In my view, both philosophy and science require attitudes akin to Scheler’s “love” and “self-humbling”. In the current debate on virtue epistemology, open-mindedness and intellectual humility are often mentioned as important virtues in philosophy and science. My thought here is that a parallelism between love and open-mindedness, on the one hand, and self-humbling and humility, on the other, could be traced in order to show that the scientist is not only moved by a wish

to control and manipulate the environment, but she also must exhibit other epistemic virtues and some of them come close to the moral activities which according to Scheler are exhibited by the philosopher. Though this parallelism is obviously imperfect because Scheler does not speak of virtues but of moral attitudes and acts,<sup>15</sup> my idea against Scheler is that both the philosopher and the scientist must show different competences in order to excel in their task.

### 6. *Reformulating Scheler's thesis in terms of virtue epistemology*

These challenges and objections are important because they demonstrate that Scheler's metaphilosophical thesis cannot be accepted without simultaneously committing ourselves to problematic metaphysical views. Should then the thesis that philosophical knowledge presupposes a moral attitude be rejected? In my view, Scheler's thesis entails a kernel of truth insofar as it claims that true philosophers exhibit certain competences that make them able to attain philosophical knowledge. In line with this thought, in this section, I suggest a moderate interpretation of Scheler's thesis in what I think are less controversial terms. More precisely, I will gesture toward a reformulation of his thesis in terms of current virtue epistemology. In so doing, I will leave aside the metaphysical idea that the moral attitudes required to attain philosophical knowledge aim at putting us in contact with a realm of absolute being.

In this regard, I want to end this paper with a proposal to explore the extent to which Scheler's thesis that love, self-humbling, and self-mastery are moral preconditions of philosophical knowledge can be made fruitful for current research as a thesis about epistemic virtues necessary for philosophical knowledge. Clearly, this proposal moves us away from Scheler, but in my view it nevertheless opens new and intriguing paths of research about the abilities we must exercise in order to attain philosophical knowledge.

My thought here is that Scheler's moral conditions of love, self-humbling, and self-mastery can be transposed into more contemporary terms by looking at the debate on virtue epistemology. Since an elaboration of all these conditions is beyond the context of this paper, I will consider here just one of them: self-humbling. Consider in more detail the concept of intellectual humility. In virtue epistemology, intellectual humility is described as an epistemic character trait whose exercise might lead us to obtain epistemic value. In contemporary accounts the term is used in different meanings. For instance, Whitcomb

<sup>15</sup> Though the phenomenon of "self-humbling" is not described by Scheler in terms of a virtue, in his essay on "The Rehabilitation of Virtue" in which he examines humility, he explicitly employs this term (Scheler 2005: 24).

*et al.* focus on three meanings of the term (2017: 512-516) while Snow distinguishes eight meanings (Snow 2019: 178-195). Some of these accounts interpret intellectual humility in terms of a disposition but, interestingly, in her account, Tanesini has defended the idea that humility is a cluster of attitudes. As she puts it: “it is a cluster of strong attitudes (...) directed toward one’s cognitive make-up and its components, together with the cognitive and affective states that constitute their contents or bases, which serve knowledge and value-expressive functions” (Tanesini 2018: 399). Yet Tanesini interprets this attitude as configured partly by modesty, a respect for one’s intellectual strengths, and an acceptance of one’s limitations. For Scheler, humility is distinct from modesty (*Bescheidenheit*). First of all, modesty but not humility is associated with shame. In addition, while modesty is a social attitude which can be understood only with reference to other human beings, humility is a personal and individual act. In spite of these differences, my thought here is that Scheler’s concept of self-humbling could be transposed into more contemporary concepts such as that of intellectual humility.

Second, it should be investigated whether or not the three conditions mentioned by Scheler are exhaustive or whether the list needs to be extended. In my view, though love, self-humbling, and self-mastery are important, these are not the only attitudes required by the philosopher. She must also be sensible, honest, courageous, purposeful, and determined, to mention but a few.

Third, it should be examined whether these activities come in different proportions when we philosophize and when we do science.

Finally, it should be examined to what extent the moral attitudes mentioned by Scheler can be translated in terms of virtues, and whether these virtues are moral but also fulfill an epistemic function, or whether these are epistemic virtues outside the moral domain.

In developing these different transpositions, we would leave behind Scheler’s wider project and its strong commitment to metaphysical views. Yet, I also think that this is possible because Scheler’s project is also a pedagogical project. Moreover, my proposal here should be an attractive one insofar as I am suggesting that we can reinterpret and develop Scheler’s thesis in terms of current virtue epistemology yet without committing ourselves to his metaphysics: namely the idea that the philosopher must exhibit certain moral attitudes in order to excel in the pursuit of her task.

## 7. *Concluding remarks*

In this paper, I have explored Scheler’s metaphilosophical thesis according to which philosophy presupposes a moral attitude. From the reconstruction

and discussion of Scheler's thesis elaborated from sections 2 to 4, three main claims can be extracted. First, Scheler is an essentialist regarding the nature of philosophy and the objects of philosophical knowledge. More specifically, he regards philosophy as intuition of essences. Second, unlike Husserl for whom philosophy should be a rigorous science, Scheler defends the view that philosophy is not only fundamentally different from the sciences, but it also deals with objects which are at a more elevated level. Third, Scheler argues that philosophical knowledge requires the moral conditions of love, self-humbling, and self-mastery. Yet this thesis is intimately linked to his philosophy of affectivity, ethics, and metaphysics: the three mentioned acts enable finite beings to participate in essential reality. Section 5 evaluated the plausibility of Scheler's metaphilosophical thesis and argued that the thesis cannot be accepted without simultaneously accepting controversial metaphysical claims. In section 6, I called for a reformulation of the thesis, transposing his idea of moral attitudes in terms of virtues required by the philosopher in order to excel in her task, and suggested to examine whether these virtues differ in kind, proportion, and goals from those exhibited by the scientist.<sup>16</sup>

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