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# ON SCHELER'S METAPHYSICS OF LOVE: AN APPRAISAL

*abstract*

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*In the following pages we are going to briefly recollect some of Scheler's main arguments concerning the status of "affective life" and to try a sympathetic appraisal of the bearing of these theses. After resuming Scheler's assessment of love and showing its conceptual connections with intentionality, spiritual values and sensuous corporeality, we shall sketch an account of the ontological and axiological role of love. Love turns out to be interpretable as a pervasive drive that shapes both natural and cultural history, while history, in its most comprehensive sense, is not viewed either as sheer contingency or as teleology, but rather as an exploratory cosmological venture.*

*keywords*

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*Scheler, love, ontology, axiology, biological life, instinct*

Max Scheler's analyses represent one of the major contributions to a theory of value in the twentieth Century. As is well-known, a peculiar role is played in his theoretical account by the relation between the affective sphere, the axiological ordering and the cognitive dimension. In the following pages we are going to briefly recollect some of Scheler's main arguments concerning the status of "affective life" and then to try a sympathetic appraisal of the bearing of these theses.

### 1. The Status of Love in Scheler's Axiology and Ontology

Some interpretations notwithstanding<sup>1</sup>, Scheler's account of the connection between affectivity and axiology does not hinge on the alleged cognitive value attributed to feelings, but on the specific role attributed to *love*. Affective experience and emotional life are essential in Scheler's account of values, but values are not apprehended by any introspective discernment of emotions<sup>2</sup>. Feelings (*Affekte*), as passive emotional events, do not reveal values, which are rather manifested by passions (*Leidenschaften*)<sup>3</sup>, and passions require an "active devotion" to their object. Love is not just different from feeling, but, against many contemporary accounts<sup>4</sup>, is not even to be understood as a sentiment, an emotional attitude similar to "like" or "dislike", insofar as such attitudes are essentially *reactive*, while love is essentially *active*. In fact, in order to understand the meaning of love in Scheler's account we have to fully grasp its character of *intentional act*: love is not just an intentional act among others, but is the originary act par excellence (*Urakt*)<sup>5</sup>.

Love is not just the midwife function that allows values to appear, but its founding character permeates all levels of cognition. All knowledge is said to be tributary to love<sup>6</sup>, and actually each objective field explored by mankind (*βίος* for biology, *φύσις* for physics, etc.) is said to be initially set up by love<sup>7</sup>,

1 See Mulligan, K., "Emotions and Value", in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Emotion*, edited by Goldie P., Oxford University Press, 2010 (p. 475-500).

2 Scheler M., *Der Formalismus in der Ethik und die materiale Wertethik*, in *Jahrbuch für Philosophie und phänomenologische Forschung*, Halle 1916 (henceforth *Form.*), 64.

3 Scheler M., „Ordo Amoris“, in *Schriften aus dem Nachlass I: Zur Ethik und Erkenntnislehre*, Francke Verlag, Bern, 1957 (p. 345-376) (henceforth *Ordo Amoris*), 73.

4 Frijda, N.H., "Varieties of Affect: Emotions and Episodes, Moods, and Sentiments", in *The Nature of Emotion. Fundamental Questions*, edited by Ekman P. & Davidson R., Oxford University Press, 1994, 74.

5 *Ordo Amoris*, 356.

6 *Ibid.*, 356

7 Scheler M., „Probleme einer Soziologie des Wissens“, in *Die Wissensformen und die Gesellschaft*, Francke Verlag, Bern 1960 (5-190), 104.

that is, by a passionate concern that takes the relevant natural field to be revealing of the sense of life and the world. Originarily, all phenomena appear to the subject as “meaningful signs”, “expressions”, and it is only in the wake of this apprehension that objectivity can be progressively obtained by a process of steady “disanimation” (*Entseelung*).<sup>8</sup> All sensations and representations are said to be possible only in the wake of an originating act of love<sup>9</sup>. The very sense of reality (*Wirklichkeit*) emerges as experience of *resistance* to an instinctive-impulsive sphere of behavior, a sphere which is grounded in love as an embodied “teleologically” oriented act<sup>10</sup>. The very perceptual process is said to depend on the axiological disposition, which in turn is grounded on a constituting loving attitude<sup>11</sup>: in the perceptual process the apprehension of percepts rests on the preliminary activation of an *imaginative* “stretching forth” (protension), which precedes and not mirrors external objects; such imaginative activity is “put to the test” and selected by the resistance that the “alterity” of the world exerts against the living drives of the embodied subject<sup>12</sup>.

At the same time, the very possibility of knowledge (any knowledge) implies the recognition of an *ontological affinity* between subject and object: imagination can turn out to be delusional, but it must not be trivialized that it *can* lead to true knowledge. The “awareness of being one” (*Einsföhlung*) that Scheler thoroughly investigates in *Wesen und Formen der Sympathie* signals, among other things, the *imagined* and *perceived* affinity between personal subjectivity and nature (living nature, but not only). This perspective issues in the late definition of *knowledge* as “relation of *participation* (*Teilhabe*) of a being to the determinations of a different being”<sup>13</sup>.

Scheler famously defines love as “a movement from the lower value to the *higher* and in which the higher value of an object or a person first flares up”<sup>14</sup>. Love, while being an intentional act, is not an act whose object is fully defined but is a constitutively “transitional” act, which is inspired by possible values of the perceived object. This trait brings love close to the

8 Scheler M., *Wesen und Formen der Sympathie*, Francke Verlag, Bern 1973 (henceforth, *Symp.*), 233.

9 Scheler M., „Liebe und Erkenntnis“, in *Schriften zur Soziologie und Weltanschauungslehre*, Francke Verlag, Bern 1963 (77-98) (henceforth *Liebe u. Erkenntnis*), 96-97.

10 *Liebe u. Erkenntnis*, 78 – *Ordo Amoris*, 356.

11 Scheler M., „Erkenntnis und Arbeit“, in *Die Wissensformen und die Gesellschaft*, Francke Verlag, Bern 1960, (191-382) (henceforth *Erkenntnis u. Arbeit*), 229, 284.

12 *Erkenntnis u. Arbeit*, 315, 346.

13 „Verhältnis des Teilhabens eines Seienden am Sosein eines anderen Seienden“ (*Die Formen des Wissens und die Bildung*, in *Späte Schriften*, 111)

14 “[D]ie Liebe eine Bewegung ist, die vom niederen zum höheren Wert geht und in der jeweilig der höhere Wert eines Gegenstandes oder einer Person erst zum Aufblitzen kommt“ (*Symp.*, 155)

most general notion of *preference*<sup>15</sup>, although Scheler wants to keep the two notions separate. The main difference that Scheler underlines between love and preference is that preference would take place between values (or valued entities) that are already manifest to consciousness, while love would hinge on an intentional object whose value is felt, but would also go always beyond the present object, in an indeterminate higher direction<sup>16</sup>. Preference is regarded by Scheler as a *cognitive* function directed to values, whereas love is not just a cognitive function: love does not address values, but individual objects, from which a process is set in motion where values primarily come to light. In this process we are not initially in a position to tell (i) if the higher value towards which we are directed already exists and must be just “*discovered*”, (ii) if it did not exist yet, but its existence will be *elicited* by our loving attitude, or finally (iii) if we will find no higher value at all and the process will turn out to have been delusional<sup>17</sup>.

Love, in contrast with desire, does not tend towards satisfaction, appeasement, but is constantly open to novelty<sup>18</sup>. In fact, according to Scheler, there is a dimension of “striving for” (*Streben*) that is essential to the emergence of values, but such a striving is wholly indifferent to the sphere of ends, goals (*Zwecke*)<sup>19</sup>. Scheler recognizes in love a plurality of levels, which run in parallel with the main levels of the hierarchy of values: beyond the primal instinctual-motor (*trieb-motorisch*) level of striving, where *pleasure and pain* appear, we must recognize a *vital (sexual) love*, a *spiritual love* (inclusive of the whole cultural sphere) and a *personal love*, which strives for the Absolute.<sup>20</sup>

In Scheler's account love has an essential continuity across all appearances and manifestations of the world. At the same time, such continuity must not be interpreted as if it revealed an elementary core, a lowest common denominator to which all expressions of love should be *reduced*. Each expression of love at different levels (sexual, spiritual, etc.) has peculiar traits that cannot be considered epiphenomena of an eternal substance. Thus, Scheler devotes many pages to show why all naturalistic interpretations of the varieties of love as results of mechanisms of “transmission”, (Feuerbach),<sup>21</sup> “extension” or “sublimation” (Freud)<sup>22</sup> of a uniform instinctual drive are misleading. And to be equally rejected are

15 *Form.*, 85-87.

16 *Symp.*, 151.

17 *Symp.*, 159-160.

18 *Liebe u. Erkenntnis*, 84.

19 *Form.*, 29-31; 35.

20 *Symp.*, 170.

21 *Symp.*, 191.

22 *Symp.*, 195f.

all pantheistic ideas of love as a form of *identification* where the beloved object would be loved since it would be recognized as originally belonging to the subject (as in Fichte's idea of Nature).<sup>23</sup> That said, however, once the reductive attitude is set aside, Scheler does not exclude that a modified notion of "sublimation" could be profitably used in ontogenetic and historical descriptions,<sup>24</sup> granted that such a sublimation can lead to novel properties and not just to novel appearances.

The question of the continuity or discontinuity (identity/difference) in the "orders of love" across phenomena remains open in Scheler's thought.<sup>25</sup> On the one hand, the necessity to introduce a sphere of loving acts at the roots of all experience appears crucial and is strengthened and cultivated in his last years; on the other hand, the phenomenological attention to qualifying differences in phenomena constantly warns him against any easy reduction of the complexity of intelligible manifestations to a homogenizing principle, like Schopenhauer's Will. The late quasi-dualistic opposition between impulse (*Drang*) and spirit (*Geist*) satisfies the theoretical need to account at the same time for a unitary constituting value-driven intentionality, which subtends each and all meaningful experiences, and for an articulation of irreducible levels of love (and experience). In this picture the whole causal weight is assigned by Scheler to impulse, while spirit is said to be "powerless", except with regard to its power to limit and select the original natural sphere of vital impulse. In late texts instinct, impulse, and living energy are all read as love of a kind (*Eros*), which requires for its limitation and articulation the exercise of spirit or of love of another kind (*Agape*).<sup>26</sup>

Although the overall ontological horizon proposed by Scheler remains explanatorily patchy and incomplete, its general outlines are clear: the very unitariness of the world is conditioned by love,<sup>27</sup> whose qualifying tendency is towards the Absolute (the unconditioned totality, the *Ens a se*, God).<sup>28</sup> Love is not defined by its tendency towards the Good, however defined; rather, the "movement", the transitional act that love itself is, is the Good, if anything deserves this name.<sup>29</sup> This leads Scheler to his late vision of the world and its axiological horizon (God) as intrinsically dynamic "entities": God is conceived as a "God in becoming" (*werdender*

23 *Symp.*, 129.

24 Scheler M., „Die Stellung des Menschen in Kosmos“, in *Späte Schriften*, Francke Verlag, Bern 1976 (p. 7-71) (henceforth *Stellung*), 52-53.

25 Cf. Zhok, A., *Intersoggettività e fondamento in Max Scheler*, Firenze, Nuova Italia 1997, 44-49; 120-193.

26 Scheler M., *Schriften aus dem Nachlass III*, Bouvier, Bonn, 1987, 235. - *Symp.*, 103.

27 *Ordo Amoris*, 357-359.

28 *Ordo Amoris*, 355.

29 *Symp.*, 165.

Gott)<sup>30</sup> and the world is said not to *have* a history, but to be a history.<sup>31</sup>

## 2. Towards an Ontological Assessment of the Role of Love

Scheler's interpretation of the epistemic and ontological role of love, which we have briefly summarized, is fascinating and controversial, full of exegetic aporias and rich of unexplored suggestions. We have tried elsewhere to produce a plausible immanent interpretation of Scheler's theory of love and value.<sup>32</sup> Here, in the following few pages we would like to go somehow beyond exegetical faithfulness and try to suggest a way in which Scheler's understanding of love can be read as an ontological vision with good reasons to be regarded not just as interesting, but even as *true*, insofar as ontological theses are in the spectrum of truthful judgments. It seems to us that there are three main theses that deserve to be re-considered and developed. Such a re-appraisal must be preceded, however, by a preliminary thesis concerning the methodological status of these arguments.

### 2.1. On Scheler's Phenomenologically Grounded Metaphysical Realism

As is well-known, Scheler's late theses have been criticized by Husserl as a relapse into metaphysical naturalism (anthropologism).<sup>33</sup> This criticism is correct, insofar as Scheler does not restrain his theses to what can be expressed under *epoché*, but formulates also hypotheses and theses, with an unashamedly metaphysical character of naturalistic brand. The outline of *philosophical anthropology* discussed in the *Stellung des Menschen im Kosmos* is a clear example thereof. Scheler does not methodologically clarify the reasons that could ground the extension of his arguments from the phenomenological sphere of intentional objects to ontological assertions concerning the transcendent sphere (where his "cosmological" vision certainly belongs).

That said and granted, I would be inclined to reply that Scheler's main philosophical interest, unlike Husserl's, is pre-eminently ethical and this intent can be hardly satisfied by a generalized suspension of the commitment to reality: the sphere of action constantly requires the passage from the certainty of self-evident essential relations to the probabilistic bets of decision and enactment. Insofar as philosophy is concerned with practical reason, it must make room sooner or later for stances concerning the transcendent sphere (the "reality in itself"). To be clear, this is no objection to

<sup>30</sup> *Stellung*, 70.

<sup>31</sup> Scheler M., „Idealismus-Realismus“, in *Späte Schriften*, Francke Verlag, Bern 1976 (183-242), 236.

<sup>32</sup> Zhok, *op. cit.*

<sup>33</sup> Husserl, E., "Phänomenologie und Anthropologie", in *Aufsätze und Vorträge (1922-1937)*, *Husserliana XXVII*, ed. Thomas Nenon and Hans Rainer Sepp, Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1989 (p. 164-181), 181.

the methodological validity of *epoché*, but simply recognizes the legitimacy of circumscribed “suspensions of the suspension of judgment”, in the sphere of moral philosophy. This is a position with an established history even outside the phenomenological tradition: we can identify it in Kant’s “moral re-evaluation” of the ideas of pure reason, as well as in Kierkegaard’s (or Sartre’s) calls for free ethical commitment.

In Scheler, his sympathy for religious thinkers notwithstanding, we do not find any lighthearted leap towards metaphysical “bets”: his thought is and remains based on phenomenological analysis, which provides the sphere of essential certainty, from which he sometimes feels obliged to venture into metaphysical landscapes dealing with the Absolute. In the following, admittedly speculative, considerations we will follow this general approach.

## 2.2. Love and the Inescapability of Teleology

Scheler repeatedly underlines the essential connection between knowledge and love. His defense of this thesis is sometimes obscured by historical-philosophical references, like the frequent mention in this regard of Augustine’s vision, which may raise the suspicion that a theological agenda is at work. But this point can be certainly made understandable and appealing on immanent grounds.

I would be inclined to defend this thesis along the following lines: each cognitive act ultimately relies on *differentiation* (distinction, discernment) and *unification* (association, synthesis). But each differentiating act, the primal core of which is represented by the whole sphere of *sensations*, is always already expression of a *preference*. This does not imply subjective arbitrariness: we do not *decide* what we feel and discern, we do not decide whether macroscopic luminous differences will play a major role and subatomic changes an insignificant one in our primal perceptual ordering. Nevertheless, it is indubitable that we, as living beings, bring differences to the world insofar as they are “meaningful” for us: *each discerned difference is also a preference*. Our body perceives insofar as it produces a living reaction, which is concerned with and interested in the “stimulus”.

Does it mean that we are bound to be blind to all detectable differences that we are not bodily predisposed to grasp? In a sense, certainly not, since there are plenty of technological devices, from microscopes to telescopes, that overcome the perceptual limitations of our bodily powers. Yet, it remains always true that there is no knowledge without selection of qualifying objects of interest, and this selection is mostly untouched by the technological “amplifications of signals”. What we see through microscopes, telescopes and the like is anyway selected by “interests” that more or less mediately depend on the *prima facie* valid world of our percepts and actions (*Lebenswelt*). Technology may make us

see *more*, but there is no such a thing as *seeing all*: all perceiving is selecting. A similar discourse can be done, with even more evidence, for all *synthetic* performances. It should be evident that there is nothing like an “event”, or a “thing”, whose boundaries can be set *juxta propria principia*. We have, of course, no trouble in talking in acceptably unambiguous ways about this event and that thing, without quarreling too much about where an event (or thing) begins or ends. A dinner, a war, a car-crash, a man, a city, a cup of tea are all items that we can approximately define and intend, and only very occasionally a doubt may be raised about their boundaries (Was the dinner already over? Is here still city or already countryside? Etc.) But the philosophically crucial point is that no event or thing is intrinsically determined by any exact amount of *matter-energy in a specific space-time*. No event in the universe has intrinsically a beginning or an end: there is not a point in any extensional description where an event has objectively ceased to be. We can say that at a certain point an explosion does not deserve to be called explosion any more, but objectively we could try to go on in our description of its repercussions for ever, understanding them as its infinite “parts”. The same can be said for any event whatsoever at any level of description: there is no objective intrinsic boundary between an event, its causes and its effects. And when we mention the qualifying properties that determine the unitariness of a “thing” (cohesion, or solidity, or property homogeneity, or concordant translation of its parts, or manipulability, etc.) our choice of this or that qualifying property equally depends on our concerns and interests (primarily the constitutive concerns and interests that our body is predisposed to acknowledge).

Much the same can be said by extending our consideration from the “internal horizons” (to adopt Husserl’s conceptuality) of events and things to their “external horizons”, and especially to the overall horizon that we call “the world”. The world is no-thing in the world. The constitutive unitariness of the world has little to do with physical variables: we do not know, and may never ascertain, whether the universe is finite or infinite, whether all its parts are physically bound by physical forces (*e.g.*, gravity) or not, but all these factual uncertainties have nothing to do with our necessary understanding of the world as unitary. The point, again, is that we are teleologically bound to connect and grasp together everything that there is (for us), in order to make order in it and sense of it.

Insofar as we, *prima facie*, subsume under the expression “love” all preferential attitudes, we must grant that all cognition and all phenomena that are relevant for us are permeated by “love”. Nothing whatsoever in the world can manifest itself without being elected (or disregarded) by selective principles that depend on our constitutive “interest” in and “passion” for the world and its parts.



### 2.3. On the Open Character of Love

In the previous reasoning we have adopted an acceptance of love, which may seem to diverge from Scheler's one. But this is not really the case. In Scheler's account the qualifying trait of love is its "open" character, that is, its being directed towards something valuable that is not yet known (and in fact may never be reached or known). Occasionally the "open" character of love can be defined by opposition to the "closed" character of instinctual satisfaction, in the following sense: when we satisfy hunger our teleological impulse is apparently quenched and extinguished, while when we passionately love a human being, a form of art, a historical community, etc. we are concerned with something that appears in principle inexhaustible. However, this opposition is less clear-cut than it could seem at first: in fact the (provisional) exhaustiveness of instinctual satisfaction (sexual love as well as hunger) must not conceal the fact that, to the extent that the instinctual impulse is unsatisfied, its "target" appears to be inexhaustibly interesting, not unlike the "objects" of spiritual love. Without denying the difference in the relevant acts, the characteristic *openness* of love is to be found in different degrees at any axiological level, from pleasure/pain, to vital feelings, to spiritual passion and theological devotion. More generally, if we widen our view, we must see that all oriented impulses that animate the living subject, from seeking and discerning sensations, to synthesizing percepts, to the highest examples of spiritual love do not aim at a *settled end*, but are always openly oriented towards a satisfactory object to be found (recognized). Indeed, this description fits all levels of living inclination and propensity (preference), and this means that all our living impulses are animated by an *anonymous* "telos" to be possibly discovered over time: we *learn* what is appropriate to quench hunger or sexual arousal, as we equally *discover* newer and newer aspects of the beloved person (art, community, etc.). Actually, we never exhaust the potentialities of this exploratory inclination even at the most immediate and elementary levels: we may always discover new forms of satisfaction of "basic biological instincts", and this discovering trend is no privilege of the "highest" and more culturally mediated forms of inclination.

This invites us to notice that love, in this radical and extensive sense, represents the first core of what appears to the thinking subject as *intentionality*. Intentionality, we customarily say, is "aboutness", is being directed towards something, which is our intentional object. Usually, we mention intentional relations with implicit reference to the reflective sphere, where intentional objects are already endowed with a recognizable identity. But, as Husserl extensively showed, *thematic* intentional acts (the apprehension of contents)

constitutively rely on a “passive” pre-reflective dimension, which represents also the first articulation of temporality in the form of “retentions” and “protentions”.<sup>34</sup> The passive pre-reflective dimension that constitutes inner time-consciousness is intrinsically “appetitive”, being animated by what Husserl calls “empty protentions” (*leere Protentionen*).<sup>35</sup> Intentionality is then, in a primary sense, the intrinsic “orientation-towards” of a living being, without any settled object; without this tendency, no proper “aboutness” can subsist. Intentionality, unlike any physical relation, is a relation that subsists before and in the absence of one of the *relata*. Empty protentions describe a “relation” of this kind, a relation between a given experience and an unknown merely possible experience. If this is the core of intentionality, then the “openness” of love in all its instantiations, from sensitivity to interest, from inclination to preference, from craving to passion precisely represents this core.

#### 2.4. The “Impotence of Spirit” and the “Works of Love”

The ultimate metaphysical vision that Scheler brings forth shows the causal energy of *Drang* as the only original power in nature, while *Geist* is not reduced to an epiphenomenon just because of its ability to limit, deny and select the thrust of *Drang*. *History*, in the most comprehensive sense, turns out to be the emergent result in progress of this “dialectical” process, which manifests itself as exploratory cosmological venture.

This picture, which is just sketched in Scheler’s last writings, displays in outline all the elements of a synthesis of his understanding of “love”. Love, by which we mean a constitutive drive directed towards something other than the loving agent, something unknown but valuable, can be interpreted as the deep and inescapable drive that shapes both natural and cultural history. Analogies notwithstanding, this vision must be clearly distinguished from philosophical perspectives like Schopenhauer’s metaphysics of Will or Bergson’s conception of the *èlan vital*.

Unlike Schopenhauer, Scheler does not think that the highest impulses (like spiritual love) have to be ultimately *reduced* to an *elementary* blind drive (the Will): on the contrary, whenever *explanation* is called for, Scheler adopts the criterion of *explaining* the most elementary forms (e.g., the impulses of organic life) in the light of the more developed and articulated ones (love), rather than the other way round.

Unlike Bergson’s *èlan vital*, Scheler’s “love” is not a natural power, in the sense that it is not endowed with driving energy of its own, able to “propel”

<sup>34</sup> Husserl, E., *Die Bernauer Manuskripte über das Zeitbewusstsein (1917/18)*, Bernet R. & Lohmar D. (eds.), *Husserliana XXXIII*, Kluwer, Dordrecht 2001, 169–170.

<sup>35</sup> Husserl (2001), 9.

evolutionary trends or physical motions. Scheler's notion of love should be rather conceived, in its minimal core, as a qualifying, selective principle, which can find realization in a plurality of embodiments in (natural and cultural) history.

If we adopt a monistic ontology, as I am inclined to do, we necessarily have to attribute also to such a selective principle some physical embodiment, and therefore an "energy", but the point here is that what qualifies "love" is neither the quality nor quantity of its physical substrate, but its *function*, which in principle can be supported by a plurality of substrates.

Finally, how could we figure out this selective function? We can hold that the preferential attitude inherent in love is the qualifying trait of *life* as such. Although naturalistic accounts tend to remove this point, *life cannot* be primarily defined in terms of self-reproducing *mechanisms* (egoistic genes, autocatalytic systems, etc.): whatever chemical self-replicating organization we might happen to find, it would not be regarded as life if we could not correlate it with "behaviors" interpretable as "preference towards", "striving for", etc. Symmetrically, should exobiological investigations find bodies devoid of self-replicating structures (*Dna*, *Rna*), while displaying behaviors that manifest those "living" "preferential" attitudes, we would just update our theories and make room for a different form of life.

We acknowledge self-reproduction, self-preservation, etc. as qualifying aspects of life because and insofar as these behaviors provide an *objectified representation* of the kind of *felt preferences* that each of us primarily recognizes in the first person. Self-reproduction and self-preservation are misleadingly represented by mechanical metaphors: they are primarily urges, drives, wants, preferences that exist "beyond-the-present-towards-the-absent (resp. latent)". The biological stress on self-reproduction, self-preservation, etc. seems to focus on *endurance*, while endurance is at best the outcome of successful living, whereas the core point of life is its constitutive orientation towards.../rejection of...

In ordinary evolutionary frameworks we could see pain/pleasure of a kind (the first axiological level in Scheler's account) as a primal dimension of organized life. We know that a bacterium of *Escherichia Coli* moves upstream in a gradient of glucose; this seems to be a patent expression of *preference*. This does not necessarily involve anything like pain/pleasure. If we think, as biology invites us to do, of a multicellular organism as originated by a symbiotic ensemble of preexistent cells, we could guess that these heterogeneous cells fully reach *mutual solidarity* only when the parts of the organism are *unified* by the sense of pain/pleasure. But whatever our favorite theory about the origin of multicellular organisms, the plurality of

parts and tissues of an organism do participate in the common project that the organism is precisely when they share that basic feeling. Thus, we can indeed conceive of pain/pleasure as a first embodiment of value, discovered by the preferential attitude that pervades life; this is a level that already achieves a dimension of generality: the parts “care” for the whole.

If pain/pleasure represents a first level of value, instantiated by organisms, we can regard “vital love” (sexual reproduction) as a further axiological dimension and a further embodiment of value brought to light by “love”. This is indeed the second axiological locus in Scheler’s hierarchy of values. In fact, this is the level where the ordinary mechanism of natural selection is said to be at work. The usual version of this mechanism is that it selects and promotes the properties of the phenotype that are more fit to cope with the environment. Yet, even if this is not always properly appreciated, the orthodox truth of natural selection implies that the crucial hurdle that the organism has to overcome is not mere environmental fitness, but *fitness conducive to reproduction* (of which survival qualities are a subset). But, as already Darwin’s reflections on sexual selection showed, the choice of qualities conducive to sexual eligibility appears to be the main source of *variation* of the phenotypic properties to be stabilized. While the simple criterion of environmental fitness operates in a restrictive, convergent way, that tends towards the survival of few different forms, sexual selection seems to be a force that opens up altogether novel ranges of properties, not *opposed* to environmental fitness but *irreducible* to it. Even in quite orthodox evolutionary accounts, sexual selection may be read as the way in which room is made for the most gratuitous phenotypic traits: sexual love may be plausibly regarded as a primary source of phenotypic novelty. We can conceptualize this passage by saying that sexual instinct appears as a new embodiment of “love”, an embodiment that rests on the working of organisms and opens up in its turn new levels of organization. Not implausibly, the dimension of “intersubjective” recognition brought to light by sexual selection can be regarded as a privileged pathway for the emergence of what we call “cultural traits”. Traits that are not immediately useful, but are experienced as “interesting” can be socially selected and enforced. Intersubjective recognition can enforce novel subjective expressions, ultimately leading to ethical, aesthetical, religious “virtues”. And indeed, it can even create the ground for the acknowledgment of truth (objectivity), as ideal point of convergence of all possible subjective acceptance.

In this way we can conceive the emergence and establishment of a level of spiritual acts, where in turn new forms of love (the “spiritual love” of

Scheler's account) can emerge.

From this level onwards the way in which love can mediate bring forth novel embodiments of value is much less speculative and actually coincides with mainstream accounts of the cultural history of mankind.

In this framework, history at all its levels can be seen indeed as the exploratory journey of "love". Love now appears as a "weak force", unable to determine the traits of the physical infrastructure where it is going to be hosted, but nevertheless able to let emerge over time organizations more and more capable to choose and determine their own environment. "Love" not only discovers values, but incidentally brings to light novel embodiments of love itself, which thus acquires further qualifications, in an indefinitely developing exploration of meaningfulness.

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