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# REQUIREDNESS. AN ARGUMENT FOR VALUE-REALISM\*

\*I wish to express my gratitude to Matt Bower for his precious work of editing, which contributed a lot to improve this paper from a logical point of view as well as from a stylistic one

*abstract*

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*What is An analysis of Requiredness? This paper presents three versions of an argument in defence of a form of value-realism. The argument is based on a principle of non-reducibility of integral wholes to sums, as informally developed by Gestalt theorists, systematically worked out by Husserl in his III Logical Investigation on wholes and parts, and exploited by Max Scheler's theory of material and axiological apriori.*

*keywords*

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*Values, norms, realism, Gestalt Theory, phenomenology*

The issue I am going to address here is the vexed problem of the ontological status of values. In short, I want to consider and defend certain arguments in support of the thesis of the objectivity of values, or Axiological Realism<sup>1</sup>. Let me begin the discussion by first proposing a phenomenological description of what I take to be a manifestly value-laden fact.

**1.**  
**An Image of Disorder**

In Berlin, in the heart of Mitte, the old East downtown, there is a small park called Koppenplatz. There you might experience the same illusion I had when trying to set aright a chair lying upside down – one of two, sitting beside an ordinary green painted table – which might easily be mistaken for a piece of furniture kindly provided by Mitte’s municipality, a comfortable seat for any tourist inclined to meditate or record memories in her journal there. Much to my surprise, the chair could not be turned over – the entire setup, chairs and all, turned out, in fact, to be a monument. Or, rather, a memorial of past tragedies, as you often come across in Berlin. My misguided attempt to put things in order is a perfect instance of the motivating power of what Wolfgang Köhler calls *requiredness* – a strict English rendering of the German term *Forderung* (and its close semantic relative, *Aufforderung*), which certain prominent German expatriates translated each in his own way: Herbert Spiegelberg, for instance, opted for the term *claim*, and J.J. Gibson, famously, coined the neologism *affordance* for it. However translated, the idea is meant to capture the phenomenon of being struck, in the middle of a world of facts, by something *required*. A state of affairs “asking” to be put in order or tidied up somehow, “claiming” something due (e.g., the right tone at the end of a melody), “inviting” you to behave in some way, in the way that armchairs beckon you to rest and high mountains demand silence. Requiredness, in its multifarious forms, takes up “An analysis of Requiredness”. This is the main thesis in Köhler’s book carrying this very title: *The Place of Value in a World of Facts*<sup>2</sup> Let’s examine this link between the notions of requiredness and value more closely.

1 By Axiological or value-realism (VR) I don’t mean that there are separate entities, called “values”, somewhere outside this given world, but that things and facts in this world can have positive or negative value qualities, as well as they have a lot of other qualities such as colours. (VR) then asserts that there are value-laden facts (thus rejecting, in at least one of its senses, the customary opposition between facts and values, or judgements of fact and value judgement).

2 Köhler (1938, 1966)

In fact, required states of affairs *are* values inasmuch as they possess the normative form of what ought-to-be or ought-to-be-done, or, in Köhler's technical terminology, of *ideales Seinsollen* or *praktisches Seinsollen* (also *Tunsollen*), respectively. We shall return to this distinction shortly. In any case, it would be hard to deny the existence (in some sense) of negative values belonging to certain states of affairs, which for that reason are bearers of requiredness, such as the upside down chair, or any of the wrong, evil, unjust, ugly, inconvenient things that fill the world. That is, negative values exist in the form of the countless evils haunting this world – all those respects in which this world is not “as it ought to be”, so that it urgently requires one to do something to change it for the better where it is still possible. For example: slaughters, cancers, the cruelty of Emperor Nero. Our brief description of being struck by a state of affairs with an appearance of requiredness – the upside down chair, such a modest and ordinary claim of domestic order – reveals even more, the further we explore the “thing itself,” in the phenomenological sense. This curious memorial turns out to be what a work of art often is – a metaphor. What at its face value is but a small disorder in the banality of our everyday life is, in truth, the shocking display of a violated home – a simple image of the banality of evil. As one looks closer one notices a string of words engraved in the pavement and framing the square space of the memorial. The inscription contains some verses and the name of their author, Nelly Sachs, who is known as the “poet of the Jewish destiny”. Here are some of her words reproduced at the memorial:

“O ihr Finger/die Eingangschwelle legend/wie ein Messer/zwischen Leben und Tod.  
O ihr Schorsteine /O ihr Finger / und Israels Leib in Rauch durch die Luft!”<sup>3</sup>

They are about the chimneys of Nazi crematories, those “fingers” tracing a threshold between life and death, like a knife, in the sky. “And Israel's body, gone up in smoke through the air”.

3 Oh, you fingers, /The threshold laying /Like a knife between life and death -/Oh, you chimneys,/Oh, you fingers,/and Israel's body through the air in smoke!

2.  
Wolfgang  
Köhler and  
the Spirit of  
Nothing But

Sachs' poem belongs to the first cycle of three published in East Berlin in 1947 under the title *In den Wohnungen des Todes* (*In the houses of death*). November 1938 coincides with the *Kristallnacht*, the pogrom against Jews throughout Nazi Germany and parts of Austria, the real beginning of the "final solution". Berlin's Neue Synagoge, a few hundred meters away from Koppenplatz, was set on fire. 1938 is also the year in which Köhler's beautifully-written, yet rigorous book, *The Place of Value in a World of Facts*, was first published (in New York). Köhler had actually left Germany by that time, having departed already in 1935. Incidentally, 1938 is the year of Edmund Husserl's death. During the last three years of his life, Husserl wrote all the material that would later become one of the most famous of his books after the *Logical Investigations*, namely, *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften*.

Köhler's book begins in a strikingly autobiographic way: "When I was a young student in Germany..."

This opening line is no mere rhetorical flourish – our brief reflection on the Nelly Sachs Memorial in Berlin already foreshadows how the subject matter of this opening might be deeply related to the content of the book, namely, Köhler's theory of values.

Wolfgang Köhler, one of the founders of Gestalt Psychology (with Max Wertheimer and Kurt Koffka), became famous after publishing his pioneering work on the cognitive faculties of anthropoid apes in 1917. After directing the Institute of Psychology at the Friedrich-Wilhelms University in Berlin, he was the only academic of the institute's faculty to engage in a public protest, when he published a newspaper article against the first wave of anti-Jewish Nazi legislation in 1933. (At about the same time, by contrast, Heidegger delivered his infamous pro-Nazi inaugural address as rector of Freiburg, and Nikolai Hartmann, the author of an imposing *Ethics* in three volumes, kept silent about the Nazi atrocities – as he did up to the end of the war, teaching at the same University in Berlin).

In the first chapter of his book on value theory, Köhler creates a masterful piece of theatre, in which an eloquent character, a kind of *Kulturkritiker*, takes aim at an unbiased, soberly detached scientist played, fittingly, by Köhler himself in a passionate invective against the practical and ethical scepticism that emerges out of Hume's is-ought divide. This scepticism amounts to a kind of axiological subjectivism or relativism, an outlook usually combined with a reductive naturalistic metaphysics. Köhler efficaciously refers to this latter outlook on value as the "Nothing But" spirit.

This eloquent character is described as one of Köhler's acquaintances, an editor of "Die Krise der Wissenschaft", a popular magazine whose title less than obliquely references Husserl's well-known last work. Köhler's character, on the other hand, evinces that conceited disdain with which scientific communities look down upon "what he [Köhler's interlocutor] called essential problems", ironically winking at the reader, who "will doubtless agree with me [Köhler, the scientist] that to put questions of principle so crudely in the foreground is not a sign of very good taste"<sup>4</sup>. No doubt this irony unmasks – in the context of 1930s Germany – a weak excuse to hide behind a veil of ethical and political indifference in circumstances where great injustices are being committed (a habit well established among academics well outside of that context. The fact that the eloquent opponent depicted in this drama actually represents Köhler's alter ego, and the courageous intellectual and moral battle he had undertaken before leaving Germany, seems undisputable when reading certain passages of the polemic:

"Let us for the moment give the name *value* to this common trait of intrinsic requiredness or wrongness, and let us call *insight* all awareness of such intellectual, moral or aesthetic value. We can then say that value and corresponding insight constitute the very essence of human mental life (...) ...Modern science has given us not merely naturalistic scepticism; it has in recent times added historical and sociological versions of relativism. Moral convictions, for instance, are said to be no more than a by-product of historical circumstances, and [are said] to vary with these. Or, again, such convictions are represented as mere factual consequences of given social structures, which vary when these are changed. (...)

...When once born in the universities, the spirit of Nothing But does not remain confined to these institutions and to scientific books. Future teachers absorb this spirit in lectures and in reading. Afterwards they propagate the same spirit in high schools, both by what they say and by what they never mention. Enlightened writers do likewise when writing in newspapers and in magazines. Thus negativism spreads through the population like an epidemic. (...) Gradually Nothing But becomes the unformulated creed of your postman, your politician, and your prime minister. When this phase is reached – and we have reached it – few people will have any stable convictions beyond their personal interests, which seem to survive even when, as values, they should also succumb"<sup>5</sup>.

4 Köhler (1966), p. 16.

5 Ibid., pp. 36-37.

I do not know of a better and more concise description of what Hannah Arendt would much later have called “the banality of evil” in its incipient state. Hannah Arendt speaks a lot in her papers on moral responsibility of this kind of ethical self-abdication of the moral subjects of a whole society, that kind of passive, and perhaps even active, consensus granted to the crime when it becomes the law of the land.

3. *Pars construens*  
against practical  
scepticism:  
anti-reductive  
ontology

What is more interesting still is the clear connection Köhler suggests between “the unformulated creed” of Nothing But – which is a comprehensive ontological stance, implying a reductionist or even eliminative stance toward any putative objects different in kind from the sort recognized by the hard sciences – and value-scepticism, i.e. moral or more generally practical scepticism concerning the cognitive makeup of practical thinking.

Alexander Pfaender’s pupil Moritz Geiger used the same expression, “the principle of Nothing But” in an essay dedicated to his master in which he clearly shows the anti-reductive spirit of a phenomenological *ontology*:

“William of Occam’s sentence [i.e., Occam’s razor], according to which *‘entia praeter necessitatem non esse multiplicanda’* [entities are not to be multiplied beyond need], was mistakenly inserted in this context [of descriptions of the life-world], whereas in order to show what is given one should have rather emphasized the sentence that *‘entia praeter necessitatem non esse diminuenda’* [entities are not to be reduced beyond need”.

Köhler’s book deserves more attention, as it is the best introduction to the theory of values that is the very core of Max Scheler’s life work. The reason for taking such an apparently indirect approach to our subject is a historical one.

Thus the immediate result of the preceding discussion is a historical thesis: even though Köhler’s book was published 10 years after the death of Max Scheler, its content is deeply rooted as we have seen, in the Munich phenomenology of Scheler, Pfaender and Geiger. Further investigation, as we shall see momentarily, reveals that Köhler’s ideas about value can be traced back even further to Carl Stumpf’s research circle, the common intellectual soil of both Husserl’s phenomenology, and Koehler’s, Koffka’s and Wetheimer’s Gestalt theory.

Both schools - Phenomenology and Gestalt Theory - share two basic tenets

6 Geiger (1996), pp. 93-107, p. 99

#### Two Shared Theses and Their Relation

4. which must first be clearly identified. We will consider each in its own right and then consider their interrelatedness.

The first is an ontological thesis – we may call it the Whole-Parts thesis (WP). It gets its most famous expression in Koehler's dictum that a whole is (or can be) *different* from the sum of its parts. (Köhler explicitly denied those who would misconstrue his view as the misleading or confusing statement, "A whole is *more* than the sum of its parts").

The meaning of Köhler's (correct, in my view) thesis is first explicated in Husserl's theory of Wholes and Parts (in the Third of the *Logical Investigations*). This explication lays the foundation of an extended mereology, that is, a mereology<sup>7</sup> allowing for types of wholes that are not merely sums.

The second thesis endorsed by both Gestalt Theory and Phenomenology is the fundamental axiological thesis. It is fundamental, serving as the basis of both schools' theories of value: values, negative or positive, are exemplified by, and hence are qualities of, actual states of affairs, hence, of facts. Values do have a place in a world of facts. A state of affairs need not be value-free or axiologically neutral, and specifically value-laden states of affairs even claim a name of their own in German: *Wertverhalten*. We may call this second thesis the Axiological Realism Thesis (VR). As you can see, this fundamental axiological thesis is also an ontological thesis, and a strongly anti-reductive one at that, definitely contrary to the tendency of so many to overzealously use Occam's razor.

My second and main point in this paper is to explain the precise connection between these theses. I shall try to show that the Whole-Parts thesis (WP) is the very foundation of the Axiological Realism thesis (VR), that is, that the latter is implied by the former (it cannot be false if the former is true).

$$\text{WP} \rightarrow \text{VR}$$

I shall try to prove this point by appealing to cases exemplifying WP to show that they exemplify VR as well. I shall propose three versions of this argument: a Koehlerian one (as an introduction); a (more or less) Husserlian one, and a (again, more or less) Schelerian one.

<sup>7</sup> That is, a formal theory of concrete multiplicities, like the one developed by Stanislaw Lesniewski in 1916, and restated by Leonard and Goodman (1940).

## 5. Tree forms of an argument

### 5.1. Koehler's Principle of Gestalt

Let's take the most notorious example of WP, the one first used by Christian Von Ehrenfeld in his pioneering essay *Über Gestaltqualitäten* (1890), to begin our treatment of Köhler's argument for VR on the grounds of PW. Koehler himself makes use of this famous example after recounting the "three major traits which are conspicuous in all cases of specific organization or *Gestalt*. Phenomenally the world is neither an indifferent mosaic nor an indifferent continuum. It exhibits definite segregated units or contexts in all degree of complexity, articulation and clearness. Secondly such unities show properties belonging to them as contexts or systems. Again the parts of such units or contexts exhibit dependent properties in the sense that, given the place of a part in a context, its dependent properties are determined by this position"<sup>8</sup>

We may tag these three theses as follows:

1. Anti-atomistic thesis: there are no perceptual data without inner differentiation.
2. Global properties thesis: there are properties belonging to the "system" or "whole" (e.g., the affective quality of a melody, which does not belong to its parts);
3. Position dependency thesis: parts may have properties that are determined by their position in the whole (e.g., being the leading note, being the tonic):

Here is the "old example" taken from Von Ehrenfels (1890):

"May I use an old example once more: A melody is such a context. If it is in a minor, for instance, minor is a property belonging to the system, not to any note as such. In this system the note a has the dependent trait of being the tonic with its static quality"<sup>9</sup>

Together, points 1, 2 and 3 entail WP. A melody (a "whole" or "system") is composed out of notes, but it is not reducible to the mereological sum of these notes. A mereological sum exists whenever its parts exist: the notes need not exist in any particular relation (e.g., temporal contiguity or succession, or even order of succession) to make up a sum. Any sum has ontological innocence relative to its parts: it does *not* add anything new (Principle of Universal Existence in Classical Mereology). Yet a melody does not exist just

<sup>8</sup> Koehler (1966), p. 75.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75.



because its tones exist. Hence it is something new relative to them. Moreover, different parts give origin to different sums. For if two multiplicities engender the same sum, the two multiplicities are one and the same. So, if a sum has different parts than another sum, it is surely another sum (Principle of Uniqueness of sums).

And yet, a melody can survive a change of notes. A melody can be transposed into a different register. Provided the tonal relations are preserved, the single notes may be different.

An intuitive way of understanding WP in such cases is to observe that once the tones have been “captured” in a melody, they are no longer *independent* parts or *bits* of it, but have become *dependent* parts or *moments* of it.

“We can analyze the melody, but not in independent parts. That would be the destruction of a melody. Its minor character for instance would be lost”<sup>10</sup>.

This comes very close to Husserl’s terminology – where the difference between parts and moments as formally characterized in the Third Logical Investigation corresponds to the difference between *integral wholes* – intuitively, wholes whose immediate parts are moments – and *sums*, or non-integral wholes.

On the basis of this simple instance of WP, we can very easily demonstrate our thesis.

In fact, provided we are not tone deaf, we cannot avoid to be negatively struck by a note out of tune. We cannot avoid perceiving something *wrong*. Something *out of order*, like the upside down chair.

Mereological properties (2) and (3) lie at the basis of aesthetic value-qualities (e.g., the affective quality of the melody and its well concluded development). Hence they also underwrite the phenomenon of requiredness, that is, of a normative demand as described above. The normative quality, requiredness, is somehow determined by the pertinent *Gestalt*. Since a melody is a temporal whole, normativity emerges or is felt in the unfolding of an experience:

“We play a simple sequence of chords on the piano. If these are properly chosen a definite key will develop. Supposing that in this key the ‘leading note’ is introduced in an appropriate manner, a final chord following this note is not an indifferent fact in the auditory field. It may sound *wrong* or, if it corresponds to the tonic of the key, it may sound right. If we stop after

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75.

the leading note without a further chord, the sequence will be heard as incomplete, with a vector toward completion. This vector usually develops during our approach to the leading note, and becomes most intense with this note”<sup>11</sup>.

Here is the conclusion of our argument:

“It can hardly be doubted that, in this case, these terms (right or wrong) refer, phenomenally, to something in the tones, not in ourselves”.

### 5.2.1. Husserl’s Extended Mereology

There is – already at face value – a deep analogy between the founding principles of Gestalt Theory and the basic intuitions of Husserlian phenomenology. It is more than an analogy: it’s a common root in the workshop of Carl Stumpf’s teaching, first in Halle, (where Stumpf was the doctoral advisor for Husserl’s dissertation on the concept of number, which ultimately became the *Philosophie der Arithmetik* in 1891), and then in Berlin, where he had the future founders of Gestalt Psychology as students of his. This resemblance between Köhler’s views and Husserl’s is on prominent display in the section on “Figural moments” in Husserl’s first published book. After describing examples of perceptual wholes such as a line of soldiers, a heap of apples, a row of trees, a flight of birds, a flock of geese, he observes that these pluralities are not only perceived as such, but are also perceived as what Koehler would have called “systems” or “contexts”, characterized by a peculiar manner of belonging together. This mutual belonging is clearly expressed in ordinary talk of matters like a line, heap, row, flight, flock, swarm, etc.<sup>12</sup>

Husserl elaborates this point with a deeply interesting description:

“In all cases, the differences of these quasi-qualitative moments stand in functional dependence, at one moment on the internal properties of the pertinent partial intuitions, at another moment on certain relations and relational complexes that connect the partial intuitions with one another, at another moment on the two together.”<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 83.

<sup>12</sup> Husserl (1891, 1992), p. 204

<sup>13</sup> “In allen Fällen stehen die Verschiedenheiten dieser quasi-qualitativen Momente in Funktioneller Abhängigkeit bald von der inneren Beschaffenheiten der bezüglichen Teilanschauungen, bald von gewissen Relationen und Relationskomplexen, welche die Teilanschauungen miteinander verknüpfen, bald von beidem zusammen”, *ibid.*, p. 204.

It is very easy to recognize point 3 occurring in Köhler's description of Gestalt qualities. Husserl describes this kind of unity as a "quasi-qualitative moment", that is, as something more than a just conceptual or set unity, and different, as well, from the unity of a sum. He goes on to say ( here we find again Köhler's point 2):

"Indeed, we shall even attempt to ground the notion that these moments must really be viewed as unities in which the particularities of the contents of their primary relations fuse together. I say 'fuse' and thereby emphasize that the unitary moments are precisely something other than mere sums."<sup>14</sup>.

Yet, Husserl was not fully satisfied with the preceding description of this phenomenon. The text from 1891 just cited is the initial basis for the powerful theory of Wholes, with the Sums as limiting cases, he would develop in the Third of his *Logical Investigations*. There he elaborates a version of extended mereology, advancing towards a proper formal characterization of all possible degrees of integral wholes, arranged in a hierarchy according to the "tightness" or "looseness" of the "unity" of parts in a whole – with "sums" as the lower limiting case. The phenomenon of perceptual Gestalten (or figural moments) is only one class of cases to which Husserl's theory applies.

Husserl's theory has a much broader ambition, as we shall see. Since it is impossible to present the theory in its formal richness within the limits of this paper<sup>15</sup>, we shall only try to convey the driving intuitions behind it. Let's turn our attention to that well-known phenomenological dictum – "back to the things themselves". This dictum expresses a basic principle of phenomenology, i.e. *the principle of priority of the given over the construed*. Of course, there is nothing uniquely phenomenological about that principle by itself. It's a typical feature of empiricism. What phenomenology rejects about empiricism is, to put it in Köhler's words, that the given – the phenomenal world – is "an indifferent mosaic" or "an indifferent continuum". In short, to put the point positively, the given has form, structure, organization *as such*. That is, contrary to Kant's ascription of the formal component of experience to subjectivity alone in the so-called

14 "Ja, wir werden sogar die Ansicht zu begründen versuchen, dass diese Momente geradezu als Einheiten zu betrachten sind, in welchen die Besonderheiten der Inhalte oder deren primäre Relationen miteinander verschmelzen. Ich sage "verschmelzen" und will damit betonen, dass die einheitlichen Momenten eben anderes sind als blosse Summen"

Husserl (1992), p. 204, translations kindly provided by Matt Bower.

15 I made an attempt to present Husserl's Theory of Wholes and Parts as an extended mereology including classical mereology for the limiting case in which a Whole is a Sum, in De Monticelli (2013).

“manifold of the intuition”, it has form or structure *as given to the senses*. This discovery – let’s call it the Gestalt principle – may well be the common (“Stumpffian”) heritage of phenomenology and Gestalt theory. Husserl advances the principle in two important steps.

The first step is a generalization from ordinary *perceptual* objects to all sorts of *intuitively given* ones, including ideal objects (or “systems”, such as mathematical ones). To be “given”, in any modality of intuitive presence – be it sensory perception, emotion, empathy, logical or mathematical intuition – is to be given as a structured, internally differentiated, organized whole or as a part thereof.

Let’s consider a few cases supporting this generalization.

The simplest nuance of blue cannot appear but against a differently coloured background. A blue sky cannot appear as blue totality except in a shaped extension – the celestial vault, for example. A simple tone must have a pitch, a duration, and a timbre. A type letter must preserve its articulated shape in spite of its countless variant tokens. Even a very simple logical truth, let it be

$$\neg (p \& \neg p)$$

shows the required articulation of “dependent” ( $\neg$ ,  $\&$ ) and “independent” meanings ( $p$ ).

One can easily see that this generalization of the Gestalt Principle amounts to introducing two highly disputed and interrelated phenomenological theses:

- a. there are many more modes of intuitive cognition than sensory perception;
- b. any object of intuitive cognition exhibits a structure – or, in terms more familiar to phenomenologists, an eidetic component.

In other words: saying that Gestalt is everywhere amounts to saying that eidetic structure is present wherever a content is (intuitively) given. The second step after generalization of the Gestalt Principle is the explication of the nature of this structural richness or Gestalt. This is a step Husserl accomplishes by means of his extended mereology. Understanding this second step correctly will put us in a position to see this contentious doctrine of Husserlian phenomenology, namely, its profusion of eide or essences throughout the world, in a completely new light. Let’s consider the “figural moments” again, e.g., a line of trees, a school of

fish, a flock of geese, a swarm of birds, etc. The unity provided by a Gestalt or “quasi-qualitative moment” is *neither the purely conceptual unity of a set* (i.e. of a collection defined by any abstract condition), nor *the mere aggregation’s unity of a mereological sum*. It is, instead, a unity resting on the specific “contents” of the component elements, which we may term a *unity of containment*.

Neither sets nor sums depend on the nature of their components. Let’s forget about sets, since the domain of set theory includes all sort of abstract objects<sup>16</sup>. Consider classical mereology, which is meant to be a theory of material objects, i.e. objects existing in space and time or at least in time.<sup>17</sup> How can we capture the difference between an arbitrary collection and an integral whole, i.e. a whole whose unity is dependent or founded on the nature of its “contents”? Husserl’s answer is simple and insightful: an arbitrary collection is such that each element of it can be kept invariant

“under conditions of absolutely free variation... of all contents associated with it, which is the same as saying it would ... remain unaffected by the elimination of such contents”<sup>18</sup>.

Contents can be contained in this way if and only if

“there is in the ‘nature’ of the content itself, in its very being, no dependence on other contents”<sup>19</sup>.

16 Husserl distinguishes between “a categorial unity corresponding to the mere form of thought”, and a “real (reale) unity”, yet to specify in types of “unitary foundations [our “unities of containment”] giving rise to “the various sorts of whole” (Husserl 2001, vol. II §23, pp.38-39)

17 Since D. Lewis’s successful attempt at rephrasing set theory within mereology, in its turn presented as the metaphysics of concrete material objects (in a Quinean, Goodmanian and Ockhamian spirit), mereology itself has become the conceptual frame of reductive metaphysics, pulverizing everyday material objects, persons and artefacts, down to the ultimate stardust which everything material is admittedly made of. So, although formal mereology, like formal ontology more generally, does not include any constraint on its possible domain, the classical interpretation of it, going back to Goodman and Quine (virtually to Ockham), more recently further refined by Lewis, takes it to apply to whatever has space-temporal existence, as such. Cf. Lewis (1991).

18 “Die Lostrennbarkeit besagt nicht anderes, als dass wir diesen Inhalt in der Vorstellung identisch festhalten können bei schrankenlosen (willkürlichen, durch kein im Wesen des Inhalts gründendes Gesetz verwehrter) Variation der mitverbundenen und überhaupt mitgegebenen Inhalte; und dasselbe besagt, dass dieser durch Aufhebung jedes beliebigen Bestandes mitgebener Inhalte unberührt bliebe. (...) Husserl (1968), §5, pp. 235-36  
See Mulligan and Smith (1982), p. 38.

19 “Dass die Existenz dieses Inhalts, soviel an ihm selbst, seinem Wesen nach, liegt, durch die Existenz anderer Inhalte gar nicht bedingt ist, dass er, so wie er ist, a priori, d.i. eben seinem Wesen nach, existieren könne, auch wenn ausser ihm gar nichts da ware, oder wenn sich alles um ihn herum willkürlich, dass heist gesetzlos änderte.

Oder was offenbar gleichwertig ist: in der “Natur” des Inhalts selbst, in seinem idealen Wesen, gründet keine Abhängigkeit von anderen Inhalten, es ist in seinem Wesen, durch das er ist, was er ist, unbekümmert um alle anderen”. Husserl 1901 - 1910) *Logische Untersuchungen*, II, I Teil, §5, pp. 235-36. English Translation Husserl 2001, vol. II §5, p. 9, italics by Husserl. See also Mulligan and Smith (1982), p. 38.

Correspondingly, an integral whole is such that in its contained parts a constraint is given on possible variation of any other part contained, or “kept together” in that whole: a constraint or a “law”, “rooted in the nature of the content itself”, of *bound variation* of the contents associated with or “given together” with it.

The “manner of togetherness” is different. A unity of containment, as opposed to a mere unity of aggregation, is a bound or a set of bounds determined by the nature of its contents that constrains possible (co) variations of the contents<sup>20</sup>. A sum can be seen as a limiting case of a whole, with no bond or constraint imposed on free variation of its contents. It represents a “manner of togetherness” *indifferent* to any “nature” of the component elements, *to their intuitively given being*.

Take the limiting case of a sum, i.e., of a whole whose degree of unitary foundation is zero. What constitutes this complete absence of bonds among its parts? Well, each of them can vary unlimitedly, without affecting the others. Provided it occupies a position in space-time, we can imagine replacing anything with anything else, obtaining more and more new sums. This is the Principle of Universal existence of Sums, which expresses their ontological innocence. Nothing new is added to reality by different groupings of elements.

Take any example of an integral whole. A group of birds, for instance, is such that you cannot replace one or more of the birds with just any sort of object (say, a bicycle) without destroying the group as such, the reality of the group. Or, again, consider a melody. The constraints on parts’ possible variations will be even stricter. Not only will you be unable to substitute a sound with a non-sound, but you cannot put any sound in place of that one. Transposition is possible, but only by preserving the tonality relation. Hence, this is a clear case of bound variation.

Finally, take any ordinary object of the surrounding world, like a chair. A chair can vary in its shape and stuff pretty wildly, yet only as long as the possibility for a human body to sit on it is preserved. This yields the law of possible covariation for its components. A material object too is an integral whole.

In short:

What we call the ideal essence or the nature of a thing is a bound or a

20 “Unitary foundation”, or “unity of foundation” (Einheitliche Fundierung), is the Husserlian term for what we called “unity of containment”. Husserl introduces it in §14 of the III Logical Investigation, when developing a formal theory of Wholes and Parts in terms of ontological dependence (Fundierung), unilateral or reciprocal, between parts and between parts and wholes, rooted in their very contents. This is what we termed an extended mereology, and might also be called a Holology.

constraint upon possible variation of its contents, beyond the limits of which variation that thing ceases to exist as the kind of thing it is. It is quite obvious that, once we have put essences into things in this sense, as what “contains” them or keeps them together as kinds of wholes, anything having a content of reality, or matter of fact, will also normative claims concerning its being, claims rooted in its “content”. In a way, each thing has an “ideal norm”, “*ein ideales Seinsollen*”. What makes a beautiful melody out of a sequence of notes? What makes a chair a “good” chair? Anything real and factual, in so far as it is grasped in its intuitively given contents (or, as Husserl would say, in its “*Seinsinn*”) will also be a normative source of requiredness.

We might even stop here, for this is just another formulation of our thesis

WP → VR

### 5.2.2. Husserl’s rejection of practical skepticism

But, thus framed, our thesis is still too general.

The very last step we have to do in order to see Husserl specific contribution to the refutation of ontological and axiological nihilism is to apply the idea of the gift of limits to syntax, semantics and pragmatics of any language.

Syntax, semantics and pragmatics are not posits or conventions. They are the given structures of what we call language: its ideal essence.

With this point, we are far beyond Kant. Husserl would agree with Kant that our rationality presupposes freedom, or *autonomy*: for reason is surely a faculty for self-containment, or self obligation. Yet those constraints, that we can choose to accept or to reject, are not stated or construed by the subject – they are given “in” the things themselves. The constraints are what “keeps them together”, what is given them by their *contents*.

It is on this basis that Husserl, in his early lectures on ethics, gives a compelling refutation of practical or value scepticism.

The value sceptic – or the value nihilist – says:

Everything is permitted (no action is obligatory)

Now, for semantic and pragmatic reasons, every statement has its normative implications, i.e., it requires something to be done by the one who utters it. This claim, although independently formulated and advanced by John Searle on numerous occasions, had already been defended by Husserl in the

*Logical Investigations*<sup>21</sup>. We may even say that it is the very heart of that text – especially of the Introduction, the “Prolegomena to a pure logic”. Logic does nothing other than spell out the bonds of possible truth-preserving variations of expressions in any sentence of any language. Logic is in this sense, in a Fregean wording quite accepted by Husserl, “the theory of truth.” The Idea of truth is the very first essence, or non-empirical datum. But using language is an activity: for that reason, any logical truth has a normative version – a law of inference; and, more generally, any semantic structure, has a pragmatic counterpart, as soon as the propositional content is embedded in a speech act.

What is the pragmatic counterpart of the Sceptical Point? “Being permitted”, “being due” are deontic predicates, they engage the one who asserts them universally – if he is a rational subject – to translate them into a rule of behaviour. So, the pragmatic equivalent of the Sceptical Point must be something like:

I have the norm of not having any norm

Which is, as one can see, a pragmatic contradiction.

### 5.3. Scheler

It is not surprising that the only wholehearted recognition, by Scheler, of what he owes to Husserl goes back to the principle of priority of the given over the construed – and the corresponding epistemic role of direct knowledge or intuition. Scheler also, by implication, recognizes the other half of this principle, the structural one, namely, that form is given in the things themselves, not somehow projected by the subject.

And this point is the heart of the *pars destruens*, the critical import, of Scheler’s *Formalismus* – his critique of Kant. Scheler aims at a “material” theory of values and ethics, but values are for him (and for Husserl as well, of course) only one class of essences, i.e., the class of axiological essences. On the other hand, axiological realism (VR), is the core of Scheler’s theory of values. Now, one naturally would like to know whether this thesis is simply dogmatically affirmed, or whether it can be justified, in uniquely Schelerian terms, on the basis of something similar to PW. Let us close by addressing these issues.

We can confidently answer in the affirmative that it actually *is* so justified, in so far as Scheler’s criticism of Kant is not at all limited to Kant’s ethics.

21 Husserl (1901-1910, 1968, 2001), see Prolegomena chapters I and II, especially §§ 10-16.



On the contrary, the specifically ethical component of Scheler's critique is more deeply rooted in his criticism of Kant's theory of experience generally, and, to be more precise, of its structural component. That is, he takes aim at Kant's theory of the *a priori*.

Scheler's criticism consists of two points, each highlighting a basic Kantian error and advancing a positive alternative:

0. Kant errs in identifying the *a priori* and the *formal*, but, Scheler retorts, there are also material *a priori*;
1. Kant errs in identifying the material and the sensory character of what is given in experience, whereas, Scheler avers that there are also intuitive givens of a non-sensory character

What is the rationale for this criticism? In truth, we are already familiar with it. On the one hand, organization, form, and structure are given in and with the "things themselves", as the Gestalt psychologists demonstrated in the case of perceptual contents. Perhaps the most striking discussion of this point is Scheler's analysis of the perception of a cube, which could appear in a textbook of Gestalt Psychology.

Yet, on the other hand, according to Scheler the principle of given organization extends to all sort of contents, and not only perceptual ones, as we also saw above in Husserl's account<sup>22</sup>.

Scheler's view has two more distinctive implications for our present discussion.

The first one is the radical – and almost cruel – character of his critique of Kant. Kant's philosophy, as depicted by Scheler, is haunted by an obsession of imposing some order to the given chaos. The "given", i.e., simply the input of sensory experience, is always a "plurality", a "*Mannigfaltigkeit*", and order and form are first provided by subjectivity. Space and time are not bonds of the things themselves, but "forms of pure intuition"; any other structure or organization is just the product of "activity", spontaneity, in short "work" of the mind. This "form giving activity" becomes the central dogma of post-Kantian German Idealism, as evidenced by Göthe's saying, "Am Anfang war die Tat". This amounts to a sort of protestant epistemology, a natural consequence of the "protestant work ethic"; Scheler would no doubt retort.

<sup>22</sup> Scheler (1916), p. 51.

The second point is still more interesting for our purposes. It is the rigorous application of the Husserlian account of mereology and its terminology to the realm of value. Friendship is a value. But where is it, which is its place in a world of facts? Friendship, manifests itself in a series of acts and behaviours of my friend, which can vary considerably, but which always remain within certain bounds, beyond which the friendship is destroyed. And yet, the value is not identifiable with those acts and behaviours, it always transcends the particular moments that realize it, since still more and different actions are always *required*. In short: those acts and behaviours cannot vary freely, but only within certain limits “rooted in the nature” of friendship. A value, as an axiological essence, is a law of possible (permissible) human behaviour, hence nothing subjective.

When criticising empiricist theories of values as a subjective projection of human interests, strivings, conations, or even as just states of mind, Scheler self-consciously makes use of mereological language. Just as we perceive not sense data but rather qualified things such as green meadows or blue scarves, where the qualities “necessarily belong to the structure of the thing’s unity”, we are similarly not presented with value-data but with axiologically qualified things or facts, where value-qualities “belong to the structure of the good as a whole”<sup>23</sup>

A revealing footnote to this passage will suffice as the concluding piece of evidence that VR is justified on the basis of WP. In the just referred passage, Scheler underlines a striking parallelism between “*the structure of the thing’s unity*” and “*the structure of the good as a whole*”, and points out, further, that “a small hierarchy of values is exhibited by any good”. To see his point, consider a simple example. Take our upside down chair. A chair exhibits a small hierarchy of values, such as utility and beauty. The beauty of an artefact is rigorously founded (in the sense of unitary foundation) in its utility or function: a useless chair cannot possibly be a beautiful chair. And in fact, our useless chair in Koppenplatz was no chair – it was part of a monument. Not an artefact, but a “pure” work of art. On the other hand, a useful and beautiful chair is a more valuable good than a useful and ugly

23 “Und andererseits ist gegen diese Auffassung zuzusagen: Sowenig uns in der Wahrnehmung der natürlichen Weltanschauung »zunächst« Inhalte von Empfindungen »gegeben« sind, sondern vielmehr Dinge, diese »Inhalte« aber nur so weit und sofern, als sie das Ding als solches als Träger dieser Bedeutung, und in den besonderen Erscheinungsweisen, die zur Struktur der dinglichen Einheit wesensnotwendig gehören, kenntlich machen, so wenig ist uns in der natürlichen Wertverfassung »zunächst« die pure Wertqualität gegeben, sondern diese auch nur sofern und soweit, als sie das Gut als ein Gut dieser bestimmten Art kenntlich macht und in den besonderen Nuancen, die zur Struktur des Gutes als eines Ganzen gehören. Ein jedes »Gut« stellt bereits eine kleine »Hierarchie« von Werten dar; und die Wertqualitäten, die in es eingehen, sind unbeschadet ihrer qualitativen Identität in ihrem fühlbaren Sosein noch verschieden gefärbt ». M. Scheler (1916), pp 14-15.

chair (an instance of value hierarchy).

Now the footnote clearly drives home the point:

“Since values first of all are distinguished into higher and lower, the word “hierarchy” is more appropriate to goods than the word “structure”, which is best applied to things”<sup>24</sup>

In other words, structure is what keeps things together, and makes them *require* whatever moment they need to be what they are: structure is the source of normativity in the things themselves. But the specific structure of goods is hierarchy. Hence we find here the specific form of axiological requiredness, a hierarchical one.

Therefore, Scheler has given yet further support for our contention that VR is true because

PW is true of the realm of the goods

and, moreover,

$PW \rightarrow VR$

So, by modus ponens, Value Realism is true, Q.E.D.

But demonstrating that has also revealed, as a reward for our work, the specific nature of axiological requiredness: hierarchy.

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24 “Da sich Werte vor allem nach höher und niedriger scheiden, so setzen wir besser beim Gut das Wort »Hierarchie« als, wie beim Dinge, «Struktur.«.”, *ibid.*, p. 14.

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