

## Max Scheler's *Biologievorlesung* (1908/09)

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**Abstract** The text, known as *Biologievorlesung* (1908/09), written by the German phenomenologist Max Scheler appeared in 1993 in volume XIV of the Schelerian *Gesammelte Werke* by M.S. Frings. It collects the surviving fragments of the notes on the “Gnoseological foundations of biology” elaborated by Scheler for the cycle of lectures, which were held as *Privatdozent* at the University of Munich in the winter semester of the academic year 1908-1909. Despite being interesting in many respects, the text is still largely unexplored to the very day. In this article I intend to focus on two points: 1) demonstrate the relatively advanced state of progress of the proposal expressed therein by the author compared to his real first phenomenological production between the publication in 1912 of the long article *Über Selbsttäuschungen* and 1922, the year that marks Scheler's open detachment from the Catholic cultural horizon hitherto embraced, and 2) bring out the systematic unity of the epistemological, ontological and phenomenological themes, articulated here, in a first attempt to develop an ontology of modern science, understood as the product of a vision of a historically located world, through a descriptive analysis of the intentional structures of consciousness implicated in intellectual knowledge.

**Keywords** Scheler, life, biology, eidetic description, ontology of science.

## 1. Introduction

The text, known as *Biologievorlesung (1908/09)*, written by the German phenomenologist Max Scheler, appeared in 1993 in volume XIV of Scheler's *Gesammelte Werke* by M.S. Frings. It collects the surviving fragments of the notes on the “Gnoseological foundations of biology” (*Die erkenntnistheoretischen Grundlagen der Biologie*) elaborated by Scheler for the cycle of lectures, which were held as *Privatdozent* at the University of Munich in the winter semester of the academic year 1908-1909. The text belongs to the group of documents that testify Scheler's progressive approach to the phenomenological movement.<sup>1</sup> At a historiographical level, its importance lies mainly in the fact that it contributes to shedding light on a phase of the Schelerian intellectual path that is difficult to interpret for the contemporary scholar because it is marked by the absence of publications. In fact, almost ten years of “silence” passed after the publication of the article *Kant und die moderne Kultur. Ein Gedenkblatt* in 1904 in the *Allgemeine Zeitung*: the article *Über Selbsttäuschungen* appears only in 1912 in the *Zeitschrift für Psychopathologie* and reveals the new philosophical profile of Scheler, that of the realist phenomenologist, properly inspired by the circle of young scholars gathered in Gottingen around his figure.<sup>2</sup> As regards the breadth of the fragment that has come down to us, the range of topics dealt with as well as the systematicity and depth of the argumentations put in place in the *Biologievorlesung (1908/09)* — albeit within the limits of an author who has always been accused of being little willing to deepen the analysis — are comparable only to two writings of the period 1905-1911. The first is the long fragment of the *Logik*, a work of neo-Kantian

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<sup>1</sup> The notes by Johannes Daubert (supplemented by those of Alexander Pfänder) relating to the first conference held by Scheler at the *Akademischer Verein für Psychologie* in Munich on the subject of the phenomenology of space have only recently been published by Karl Schumann. See: K. Schumann, Max Scheler. Sulla fenomenologia dello spazio. Conferenza del luglio 1907, in: S. Besoli, L. Guidetti (Eds.), *Il Realismo fenomenologico. Sulla filosofia dei circoli di Monaco e Gottinga*, Macerata, Quodlibet, 2000, pp. 89-92. Other lectures at the *Verein* were given by Scheler in the summer of 1908. Most of the arguments developed there were brought together in the first edition (1912) of the article *Über Selbsttäuschungen*, republished in 1915 in the collection *Die Abhandlung und Aufsätze: Vom Umsturz der Werte* in extended version and with the new title *Die Idole der Selbsterkenntnis*.

<sup>2</sup> Alexander Koyré describes the club as a “Schelerian sect”. On the topic see: G. Caronello, *Scheda biografica*, in: M. Scheler, *Il formalismo nell'etica e l'etica materiale dei valori. Nuovo tentativo di Fondazione di un personalismo etico*, edited by G. Caronello, San Paolo, Cinisello Balsamo (MI) 1996, pp. 97-103, p. 99.

inspiration, specifically inspired to the Marburg school, which Scheler started in 1904 by designing three volumes of which, however, only the first was completed — and that was later withdrawn from printing in 1906. The second writing is the essay *Lehre von den drei Tatsachen*, which was developed between 1911 and 1912. Despite being interesting in many respects, the *Biologievorlesung (1908/09)* is still largely unknown to the very day. In fact, only a handful of specialised studies are dedicated to it.<sup>1</sup>

In this article I intend to make a contribution in this direction, focusing my attention on two points: 1) demonstrate the relatively advanced state of progress of the proposal expressed therein by the author with respect to his actual first phenomenological production spanning from 1911-1912 to 1922, the year of the open separation from the Catholic Church and from the corresponding cultural horizon, and 2) bring out the systematic unity of the epistemological, ontological and phenomenological themes, articulated here, in a first attempt to develop an ontology of modern science, understood as the product of a vision of a historically located world, through a descriptive analysis of the intentional structures of consciousness implicated in intellectual knowledge. Before plunging in the examination of the fragment, I would like to make some introductory remarks, which will be followed by a schematic reconstruction of the structure of the article.

### *1.1 Prolegomena to the examination of the text*

First of all, I would like to recall the author's relationship with the founder of classical phenomenology, Edmund Husserl. As has been shown by in-depth historiographical studies, in various sections of his work, including the 1922 essay *Die deutsche Philosophie der Gegenwart*, Scheler deliberately distorted data relating to his first personal encounters with Husserl, perhaps in order to demonstrate an autonomous path of elaboration of the phenomenological issue.<sup>24</sup> In a well-known passage from the preface to the first unitary edition

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<sup>1</sup> G. Mancuso, Lineamenti per un'ontologia generale della natura e per una teoria biologica della conoscenza: la "*Biologievorlesung*" del 1908-1909, in: S. Besoli, G. Mancuso (Eds.), *Un sistema, mai concluso, che cresce con la vita. Studi sulla filosofia di Max Scheler*, Macerata, Quodlibet, 2010, pp. 133-158.

<sup>2</sup> W. Henckmann, Die Anfänge von Schelers Philosophie in Jena, in: C. Bermes, W. Henckmann, H. Leonardy (Eds.), *Denken des Ursprungs, Ursprung des Denkens. Schelers Philosophie und ihre Anfänge in Jena*, Würzburg, Königshausen & Neumann, 1998, pp. 11-33. For example, Scheler anticipates the meeting with Husserl by

(1916) of his masterpiece, *Der Formalismus in die Ethik und die materiale Wertethik*, Scheler writes:

I owe to the significant works of Edmund Husserl the methodological consciousness of the unity and sense of the phenomenological attitude, which binds together the coeditors of the *Jahrbuch*, men who otherwise vastly differ in both worldview and philosophical matters. The following investigations, too, owe much in their essentials to the works of the editor of the *Jahrbuch*. But I must claim the authorship of and take full responsibility for the manner in which I understand and execute this attitude, even more so, of course, for its application to the groups of problems discussed.<sup>1</sup>

Although in a highly critical sense, this claim of autonomy advanced by the author is confirmed by Husserl. In his correspondence with Adolph Grimme and Roman Ingarden, dating back to 1917-1918 and 1927-1931, respectively, Husserl describes how Scheler came into possession of his phenomenology and method, enslaving them to his own intellectual needs.<sup>2</sup> Nonetheless, it is to Husserl that Scheler largely owes his academic career. In 1910, in fact, when the latter lost his teaching position in Munich following a public scandal involving his first wife Amelie von Dewitz-Krebs — who publicly accused Scheler of amoral conduct for an alleged relationship with the wife of a colleague —, it was Husserl himself who wrote a reference letter for him in which he argued that Scheler was a researcher of the highest level, independent and rigorous from a scientific point of view. As Eugene Kelly notes, the apparently incongruous attitude held by Husserl towards Scheler and towards his phenomenological proposal is understandable only if interpreted in the light of the deep evolution that the reflection of both authors went through.<sup>3</sup>

On a strictly philosophical level, the work that initiated the entire phenomenological movement, the Husserlian *Logische Untersuchungen*, was repeatedly criticised for idealism by the young pre- and proto-phenomenologist

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a year — from 1902 to 1901 — which took place in Halle on the occasion of a meeting of the collaborators of the *Kantstudien*.

<sup>1</sup> M. Scheler, *Der Formalismus in der Ethik und die materiale Wertethik. Neuer Versuch der Grundlegung eines ethischen Personalismus*, in: *Gesammelte Werke*, Vol. II, edited by M. Scheu Scheler, Bern-München, Francke, 1980, p. 11; Engl. transl. *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Values. A New Attempt Toward A Foundation of An Ethical Personalism*, edited by M.S. Frings, R.L. Funk, Evanston (IL), Northwestern University Press, 1973, pp. xix.

<sup>2</sup> E. Husserl, *Briefwechsel*, Band III, edited by K. Schumann, Den Haag, Kluwer, 1994.

<sup>3</sup> E. Kelly, Max Scheler, in: S. Luft, S. Overgaard (Eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Phenomenology*, Routledge, London 2011, pp. 40-49, p. 41.

Scheler. In the work *Logik* he accuses him of promoting a Platonic conception of objects and logical laws.<sup>1</sup> In *Biologievorlesung (1908/09)* Scheler briefly discusses the erroneous implications of this alleged Platonic idealism as regards the theorisation of the relationship between logical and physical necessity.<sup>2</sup> The accusation of idealism is a constant in Scheler's reception of Husserl's phenomenological writings. However, as early as 1912, and thus prior to the publication of the first book of *Ideen zur einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie* (1913), which marks the birth of phenomenology as transcendental idealism as well as the break between Husserl and most of the so-called realist exponents of the phenomenological movement, Scheler will no longer speak of Platonic idealism, accusing Husserl of promoting a modern-style idealism, specifically in the Cartesian version of the primacy of internal over external perception.<sup>3</sup> The changed critical figure is silenced by the author: Scheler now contrasts writings such as *Philosophie als strenge Wissenschaft* (1911) with the “correct” objectivism of the *Logische Untersuchungen*.

Speaking of objectivism, it should be noted that Scheler's active participation in the realist circles of Munich and Göttingen progressively materialised in the assimilation of the theme of eidetics. Eidetics can be defined as a descriptive semantic analysis interested in the “ideal” (*eidetisch*) or “essential” (*wesentlich*) aspect of meanings.<sup>4</sup> It assumes the intentionality or directionality to the object as a basic characteristic of human consciousness, which phenomenologists interpret as a “lived” (*Erleben*) experience, that is, an experience in the first person — which is always an experience “of something” — more precisely an intentional experience. Both the first phenomenologist Husserl and the so-called realists of Munich and Göttingen interpret eidetics as applicable both to the “matter” and to the “form” of the idea or essence, that is to say, to its content-dependent and content-independent qualities, respectively. The idea or essence is understood here as the intentional object or correlative of

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<sup>1</sup> M. Scheler, *Logik I*, in: *Gesammelte Werke*, Vol. XIV, edited by M.S. Frings, Bern-München, Francke, 1979, pp. 11-256.

<sup>2</sup> M. Scheler, *Biologievorlesung (1908/09)*, in: *Gesammelte Werke*, Vol. XIV, edited by M.S. Frings, Bonn, Bouvier, 1993, pp. 257-367, pp. 310-311.

<sup>3</sup> M. Scheler, *Die Idole der Selbsterkenntnis*, in: *Gesammelte Werke*, Vol. III, edited by M. Scheu Scheler, Bern-München, Francke, 1955, pp. 213-293; Engl. transl. *The Idols of Self-Knowledge*, in: *Selected Philosophical Essays*, edited by D.R. Lachterman, Evanston (IL), Northwestern University Press, 1973, pp. 3-97, p. 27.

<sup>4</sup> R. Sokolowski, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999, pp. 177-184.

consciousness, which “gives itself” (*selbst gibt*) and manifests itself in an intuition that is not sense-perceptive but ideal (essential). From a methodological point of view, eidetic descriptions make use of three operations: imaginative variation, eidetic reduction and formal abstraction. The first operation coincides with the origin at the level of imagination of the potentially infinite variations of a particular instance of the analysed meaning. The second operation shifts the analytical attention from the specific qualities of the imaginative variations to the idea or essence that identifies the invariant or constant qualities of the imaginative variations. The third operation allows you to abstract from the ideal (essential) matter and concentrate the analytical attention on its form. The realists of Munich and Göttingen identify phenomenology and eidetics and, with this, they bypass the acceptance of phenomenology understood as the central descriptive psychology in Husserl until introducing the concept of phenomenology as transcendental idealism where the descriptive analysis is reinterpreted as a noetic-noematic analysis of an act-process (noesis) and of what is meant by it (noema).<sup>1</sup> In a nutshell, following the schematic reconstruction of Barry Smith,<sup>2</sup> we can say that the realists, including Scheler, advocate an object-oriented phenomenology supported by a marked anti-psychologism also critical of the Brentanian legacy that survives in the Husserlian phenomenology — understood as descriptive psychology — until 1913. The anti-psychologism of the Munich and Göttingen realists thus radicalises the criticism that in the first book of the *Logische Untersuchungen*, the *Prolegomena zur reinen Logik*, Husserl himself had moved to the psychological tendencies internal to the modern and contemporary philosophical tradition, which he estimates share a conception of logical laws and logical objects understood as empirical regularities and contents of individual and/or collective psychic life, respectively.<sup>3</sup>

As regards the topic of the cycle of lessons under consideration, the interest for biology is one cultivated by Scheler throughout the course of his life.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> G. Fréchette, Phenomenology as Descriptive Psychology: The Munich Interpretation, in: *Symposium: Canadian Journal of Continental Philosophy*, Vol. 16, n. 2, 2012, pp. 150-170.

<sup>2</sup> B. Smith, Realistic Phenomenology, in: L. Embree (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Phenomenology*, Dordrecht, Springer, 1995, pp. 586-590.

<sup>3</sup> R.M. Smid, Münchener Phänomenologie — Zur Frühgeschichte des Begriffs, in: H. Spiegelberg, E. Avé-Lallemant (Eds.), *Pfänder Studien*, Den Haag, Nijhoff, 1982, pp. 109-154.

<sup>4</sup> D. Verducci, *La phénoménologie de la vie et la philosophie selon Max Scheler*, *Analecta Husserliana*, Vol. 50, 1997, pp. 165-180. Scheler started his university studies

By joining the phenomenological movement, Scheler seems to gain those theoretical and methodological tools that are necessary for him to question himself rigorously on a series of fundamental issues, such as the essence of the living organisation, the possibility of tracing an *a priori* order in the complexity of biological phenomena as well as the limits of the scientific approach to the study of the same. As is well known, the first two issues are masterfully addressed by Scheler in the conference “Die Sonderstellung des Menschen”, which was held in Darmstadt on 27<sup>th</sup> April, 1927.<sup>1</sup> However, already during the first decade of the century, the author conducts a deep reflection on the aforementioned issues.<sup>2</sup> Scheler confronts himself with the most advanced sectors of theoretical and experimental research in the field of life sciences and with the philosophical orientations of the German and French *Lebensphilosophie* (not only Nietzsche, Simmel and Dilthey, but also Bergson, Fouillée and Guyau) and of evolutionism (especially Spencer). In *Biologievorlesung (1908/09)* the theme of biological organisation, its origin and the role played in it by evolutionary-causal factors is central and is developed within a close critical comparison with the position of a leading exponent of neo-Darwinism, such as Ernst Haeckel.

As regards the limits of the scientific approach to the study of vital phenomena, Scheler's reflection is animated by a deep need to defend a prospective pluralism that is considered threatened by the omnipervasiveness of the conceptual categories of science and, above all, by the “anonymity” in which these are placed as cultural prejudices of the modern world.<sup>3</sup> More in general, Scheler believes that science is incapable of a radical self-foundation, a task

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by enrolling in the Munich medical faculty following biology courses even after moving to Berlin. Here he studies philosophy by coming into contact with two leading exponents of the German *Lebensphilosophie*: Georg Simmel and Wilhelm Dilthey. With the move to Jena, where he becomes a student of the spiritualist Rudolph Eucken, Scheler consolidates his interests between philosophy and the life sciences.

<sup>1</sup> The text of the conference was published in 1927 in *Der Leuchter* and then, in a revised and expanded version, the following year with the new title *Die Stellung des Menschen im Kosmos*.

<sup>2</sup> M. Scheler, *Versuche einer Philosophie des Lebens. Nietzsche-Dilthey-Bergson*, in: *Gesammelte Werke*, Vol. III, edited by M. Scheu Scheler, Bern-München, Francke, 1955, pp. 311-341.

<sup>3</sup> M. Scheler, *Phänomenologie und Erkenntnistheorie*, in: *Gesammelte Werke*, Vol. X, edited by M. Scheu Scheler, Bern-München, Francke, 1957, pp. 377-431; Engl. transl. *Phenomenology and Theory of Knowledge*, in: *Selected Philosophical Essays*, edited by D.R. Lachterman, Evanston (IL), Northwestern University Press, 1973, pp. 136-201.

that he considers adequately performed only by a critical philosophy, which, like the phenomenological one, is based on the eidetic analysis of the meanings adopted in the scientific theories.<sup>1</sup> This is the position that the author also defends in *Biologievorlesung (1908/09)* regarding the life sciences. However, in a subsequent cycle of lectures that Scheler gives at the University of Cologne in 1926-1927 on the theme “The essence of vital phenomena” (*Das Wesen der Lebenserscheinungen*) the epistemological issue, in particular the problem of the limits of scientific knowledge of vital phenomena, becomes a matter of secondary importance.<sup>2</sup> The Schelerian discussion now focuses on the possibility of a critical theory of knowledge of the living that proves capable of facing the “paradox” of the biological conditioning of the principles and categories adopted by the acquainted.<sup>3</sup> A decisive factor in this passage seems to me to be the elaboration starting from 1923 of the theory of metascience, a theory that is part of the metaphysics programme whose delineation Scheler is committed to until his death — which took place for a heart attack on 18<sup>th</sup> May, 1928. The eidetics description now becomes functional to the development of a “metaphysics of first-kind”, the so-called metasciences, in which the axioms that formally structure the scientific disciplines are first thematised through an eidetic study to then be connected, through inferential reasoning, to the positive, empirical results reached by the same.<sup>4</sup> This is performed in order to achieve a critical knowledge of the object domain of the various disciplines extended both to the being of the essence and to the being of existence.

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<sup>1</sup> M. Scheler, *Vom Wesen der Philosophie und die moralischen Bedingungen des philosophischen Erkennens*, in: *Gesammelte Werke*, Vol. V, edited by M. Scheu Scheler, Bern-München, Francke, 1954, pp. 61-101; Engl. transl. *The Nature of Philosophy and the Moral Preconditions of Philosophical Knowledge*, in: *On the Eternal in Man*, edited by B. Noble, G. McAleer, New Brunswick (NJ), Transaction Publisher, 2010, pp. 66-104.

<sup>2</sup> Of the six notebooks that make up the *Biologievorlesung* of 1926-1927, the first notebook and some fragments of the second were published as part of the *Manuskripte zu den Metaszienzen*. See: M. Scheler, *Manuskripte zu den Metaszienzen*, in: M. Scheler, *Gesammelte Werke*, Vol. XI, edited by M.S. Frings, Bern-München, Francke, 1979, pp. 125-184, pp. 164-184. The last five notebooks were only recently edited. See: W. Henckmann, *Schellers Biologie-Vorlesung von 1926/1927*, in: D. Gottstein, H.R. Sepp (Eds.), *Polis und Kosmos. Perspektiven einer Philosophie des Politischen und einer philosophischen Kosmologie*, Würzburg, Königshausen & Neumann, 2008, pp. 251-271.

<sup>3</sup> M. Scheler, *Manuskripte zu den Metaszienzen*, pp. 164-165.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 125.

## 1.2 Structure of the article

The present article has the following structure: § 2 is dedicated to the examination of sections I, III and IV of the *Biologievorlesung (1908/09)* and attempts to highlight a continuity of themes and arguments with the subsequent Schelerian writings, between 1911-1912 and 1922. § 3 concentrates on section II of the fragment, investigated under a systematic lens. In this respect, my goal is to make explicit the presence of a critical project in the making aimed at founding modern science on an ontological basis thanks to the tools provided by eidetic analysis. Compared to the late theory of metasciences, this project certainly lacks an adequate formulation of the critical problem. Nonetheless, especially when considered in the light of the developments that will affect it up to 1921, it reveals original characteristics that depend on the use made of the theory of worldviews (*Weltanschauungstheorie*). This theory, which was adopted by Scheler between the first and second decade of the century, originated by authors, such as Wilhelm Dilthey, Heinrich Gomperz and Wilhelm von Humboldt.<sup>1</sup> The conclusion of the article attempts to reconstruct the Schelerian analysis of the concept of “vital form” (*Lebensform*), a central concept in *Biologievorlesung (1908/09)*, which, however, does not find an adequate exploration herein.

## 2. From “forms in general” to “instinctive movements”: the eidetics of *bios* in *Biologievorlesung (1908/09)*

### 2.1 “Forms in general”

The first section of *Biologievorlesung 1908/09* is entitled “forms in general” (*Formen überhaupt*) and is organised into three subsections: a phenomenological introduction (*Phänomenologische Vorbemerkung*) and two paragraphs dedicated to the distinction between proper form and form of relationship (*Eigenform und Beziehungsform*) and to cosmic individuals (*Kosmische Individuen*), respectively. As you can easily guess, even from the little information provided, the section is very diversified in terms of contents, ranging from (the analysis of) the concept of object form, its modes and levels of reality, to the distinction between matter and form in objects connoted as living and as non-

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<sup>1</sup> M. Properzi, *Ontologia formale e teoria della negazione dialettica nella prima fenomenologia di Max Scheler. Un percorso di studio dalla fenomenologia alla teoria delle categorie*, *Acta Philosophica*, Vol. 29, n. 1, 2020, pp. 115-136.

living, to the concepts of biological evolution and geological evolution up to the critique of the scientific theory of natural evolution. According to the title, the unifying element of such a vast set of subjects are the object forms, interpreted as “basic elements of our worldview”,<sup>1</sup> a characterisation that Scheler will discuss in relatively broad terms in the essay *Vom Wesen der Philosophie* published for the first time in 1917, then in 1921 with the new title *Vom Wesen der Philosophie und die moralischen Bedingungen des philosophischen Erkennens*.<sup>2</sup>

Scheler first of all distinguishes the form from the qualia, in particular from the sensory qualia: the form does not coincide with these pre-intentional qualitative data that lack object structure, which can vary only within a form to which the experiencer has already had access to.<sup>3</sup> The form cannot even be reduced to the structure or order relationship that organises the qualia as components of the intentional object. It cannot, therefore, be interpreted as the result of an associative connection (*assoziative Verbindung*) that structures, orders or organises the qualitative data in the object, according to what the proponents of associationism in psychology claim. In this context, Scheler proposes a classic example: the melody of a song composed of a multiplicity of tones, which is perceived by the listener as one and the same even when the song is performed at different tonal heights.<sup>4</sup> A first positive description of the intuitive datum sees in the form a characteristic, a property (*Merkmal; Eigenschaft*) of the object, which Scheler interprets, therefore, as a whole (*Ganzen*) composed of parts (*Teilen*), namely the object qualities, according to the scheme detailed by Husserl in the third logical research.<sup>5</sup>

At this point Scheler delimits and circumscribes the data described according to a procedure, i.e. that of eidetic reduction, which he compares to the method adopted by negative theology in response to a criticism made by Wilhelm Wundt to the Husserlian *Logische Untersuchungen*.<sup>6</sup> The form, Scheler clarifies, is neither a quality, nor a whole, nor a relationship, nor a feeling, nor a synthetic act of consciousness and not even a teleological unit (*teleologische*

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<sup>1</sup> M. Scheler, *Biologievorlesung (1908/09)*, p. 259.

<sup>2</sup> M. Scheler, *The Nature of Philosophy*, pp. 89-97.

<sup>3</sup> M. Scheler, *Biologievorlesung (1908/09)*, p. 259.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 259-260.

<sup>6</sup> M. Scheler, *Probleme der Religion*, in: *Gesammelte Werke*, Vol. V, edited by M. Scheu Scheler, Bern-München, Francke, 1954, pp. 27-451; Engl. transl. *Problems of Religion*, in: *On the Eternal in Man*, edited by B. Noble, G. McAleer, New Brunswick (NJ), Transaction Publisher, 2010, pp. 105-356, p. 137.

*Einung*).<sup>1</sup> A series of more or less traditional conceptualisations are thus rejected. First, a certain phenomenology affected by “sensualistic prejudices”.<sup>2</sup> From the reading of *Lehre von den drei Tatsachen* we know that this sensualistic phenomenology is that of the early Husserl, to whom Scheler accuses of having amplified the error of the master Carl Stumpf and of certain exponents of the Gestalt psychology, basing the idea on the phenomenal data of sense-perception.<sup>3</sup> However, Scheler forgets the triple articulation of the data as real (*real*), as intentional (*intentional*) and as “*reel*”, that is part of the subjective consciousness, which Husserl establishes around 1907 and which allows him, among other things, to overcome that type of foundation accused by Scheler of sensualism.<sup>4</sup> The other objectives of Scheler's critique are Brentano, the mechanistic philosophy linked to the psychological theories of association, Descartes, Aristotle and above all Kant.

In *Biologievorlesung 1908/09* we find a first brief formulation of the famous criticism that Scheler will move to the Kantian conception of the formal in the later work *Formalismus*. The form does not coincide with the a priori laws of apperception or subjective synthesis of the object. In the fragment under consideration here, Scheler writes that

[in Kant and in the Kantian tradition — editor's note] the following is wrong: a) that the synthetic act in general [...] at first creates or constitutes the form; b) that the forms of external perception (be they aesthetic or theoretical) generally derive from the reality of an internal perception and that only starting from the latter's data are they transposed into the external sphere”.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> M. Scheler, *Biologievorlesung (1908/09)*, pp. 259-261.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 260.

<sup>3</sup> M. Scheler, *Lehre von den drei Tatsachen*, in: *Gesammelte Werke*, Vol. X, edited by M. Scheu Scheler, Francke, Bern-München 1957, pp. 431-474; Engl. transl. *The Theory of the Three Facts*, in: *Selected Philosophical Essays*, edited by D.R. Lachterman, Evanston (IL), Northwestern University Press, 1973, pp. 202-287.

<sup>4</sup> As Tassone asserts: “Around 1907, Husserl clarifies that the distinction between fact and essence can actually be found within the realm of ‘pure consciousness’ conceived as an interior sphere of egoic-life [...] Since an essence does not possess its being as a ‘*reel*’ part of the stream of consciousness, what is essential cannot be immanent in the stronger ‘phenomenological’ sense of that term. Therefore interiority, transcendently apprehended and revealed in phenomenologically reduced consciousness, has (for Husserl) a different mode of being than subjective and real mental processes” (B.G. Tassone, *The relevance of Husserl's Phenomenological Exploration of Interiority to Contemporary Epistemology*, *Palgrave Communications*, Vol. 3, 2017, 17066, p. 4).

<sup>5</sup> M. Scheler, *Biologievorlesung (1908/09)*, p. 261.

The author adds that the confusion between form and synthetic law is what affects the Kantian understanding of the aesthetic forms of temporality and spatiality, which also turns out to be correct when interpreted as forms of the ordering of qualitative data, considered as such irreducible to the order relation of the above.<sup>1</sup> As I will be able to illustrate in the conclusion of this article, in its essential lines, the constructive part of Schelerian theory, according to which temporality and spatiality are genera of a more original form that precisely in-forms the experience or consciousness that the living being has of its own surrounding environment, can be considered already present in *Biologievorlesung 1908/09*, although not sufficiently developed.

In the second subsection Scheler distinguishes between proper form (*Eigenform*) and form of relationship (*Beziehungsform*) in terms of two modalities of conceiving form as intuitive data: a direct or authentic modality (*echt*) and an indirect or apparent modality (*scheinbar*).<sup>2</sup> The distinction concerns the apprehension of the form, which can be either primary and foundational for the subordinate qualia and for their order relationship, or derived and based on the (primary) apprehension of the limits imposed by otherwise formed structures, which coexist all within the same spatial order. The examples given by the author are two and both refer to the form of relationship: the lines that delimit the figure of a man drawn on a sheet of paper that is placed on a table on which the attention of the experiencer is drawn to, and the shape of the sea captured by distinguishing the water from the shore.<sup>3</sup> Scheler thus introduces another distinction: that between three levels of reality (*Stufen der Gegebenheit*) of the form. The first level is that of the form of qualia, the second is that of the form of the state of things (*Sachverhalte*), the third and last level is that of things (*Dinge*).<sup>4</sup>

At this point the conversation is abruptly interrupted perhaps due to the loss of material. The text resumes with the presentation of the concepts of mass and atom as concepts transversal to the physical and chemical sciences. According to Scheler, physical mass and atoms are measures of movement that do not involve bodily forms, which instead in-form chemical objects.<sup>5</sup> Starting from the idea of the chemical body, the author highlights the reductionism implicit in the mechanistic explanation of the physiological processes advocated

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 262.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 262-263.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 262.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 263-264.

by Emile Du Bois-Reymond and by the other experimental physiologists active at Johannes Müller's Berlin school between the second half of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. In contrast to the idea that the physiological events and processes, which affect organic bodies, can be explained and predicted with statistical mathematical tools applied to the underlying physical-chemical events and processes – considered independent of the former since they are fundamental –, Scheler advances the hypothesis of superposition. According to this hypothesis, biological laws influence the manifestation of physical-chemical events and processes that take place within the organic body.<sup>1</sup> The text continues with a series of reflections on the same subject, from which Scheler extrapolates two results in the sphere of interest of phenomenology, the ideal or the essential: the vital form (*Lebensform*) is not independent of its substratum and can neither exist nor be known as a form external to matter. It follows, Scheler points out, that an essential connection between the characterization of matter and vital form takes place: if matter is understood as eternal or, alternatively, as created, the form must be interpreted in the same way — which, therefore, is eternal form (*ewig*), in the first case, and is created form (*geschaffen*), in the second case.<sup>2</sup>

The second subsection of the text concludes with an analysis of the concepts of origin (*Ursprung*) and development (*Entstehung*) of the living being.<sup>3</sup> According to Scheler, it is necessary to differentiate the two concepts by clarifying their respective semantic content through an eidetic analysis: this is the great contribution that phenomenology can make to the theory of biological evolution. Once the two concepts have been analysed with the descriptive tools of eidetics, it is possible to address the metaphysical question linked to the origin of the living being. In other words: does the living subject have its own level of being (*Seinsstufe*) or does it share it with the non-living being?<sup>4</sup> If the latter is true, then, at least in principle, the living being could have developed from inorganic, physical and chemical substances and forces. Scheler's answer to the aforementioned question is complex. It originates from the phenomenological evidence of the irreducible coordination between physical-chemical matter and vital form to reach the point of denying the possibility of the development of life, thus rejecting the idea of a being that is in common to the living and the non-living entity. Here Scheler's critical objective is Ernst Haeckel's monism, a metaphysical position that the neo-Darwinian scientist elaborates

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 264.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 265.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 265-266.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 266.

in old age, which sees in the *Substanz*, that is, in the union of matter and energy, the only principle of being. As has been shown, this type of monism implies a systematic research programme that Haeckel develops throughout his career.<sup>1</sup> This programme embraces at least three argumentative levels: a theoretical-experimental level with the so-called carbogenic theory, a modelling level with evolutionary trees and, finally, a metaphysical level with the monism of the *Substanz*. Aware of the systematic nature of the Haeckelian programme, Scheler not only discusses the concept of *Substanz*, but also the conceptual assumptions underlying the carbogenic theory and of evolutionary trees.

The carbogenic theory asserts the chemical-structural identity between diamond and monera, an alleged primitive pre-cellular (anucleated) form of living being. According to Haeckel, the theory provides scientific evidence for the unification of living and non-living beings, demonstrating that at the base of inorganic and organic chemistry there is the same elementary structure. Scheler insists on the theoretical weakness of this position, showing how the chemical sciences are conditioned by the functions and modes of sensitivity, ultimately by how bodies are perceived by the experiencer in the context of their surrounding environment. This does not mean that they cannot be said to be conditioned by the particular organisation of the human sensory system or by the actual course of their functions.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, Scheler asserts, unlike the universe which is a “cosmic individual”, a closed system from the point of view of its interpretability by the experiencer (the observer according to modern scientific terminology), corporeal worlds are open systems that can be conferred with a meaning.<sup>3</sup> Although limiting his analysis to the chemical sciences, the author here expresses a key idea of what his epistemology will be up to 1922.<sup>4</sup> This idea will be more thoroughly detailed in the second section of the text.

Concerning evolutionary trees, the Haeckelian model is based on a morphological-typological criterion probably derived from Goethe, which is different from that of the common *ancestor* used in (neo) Darwinian and (neo) Lamarckian trees.<sup>5</sup> In the central and concluding parts of the third subsection,

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<sup>1</sup> B. Dayrat, *The Roots of Phylogeny: How Did Haeckel Build His Trees?* *Systematic Biology*, Vol. 52, n. 4, 2003, pp. 515-527.

<sup>2</sup> M. Scheler, *Biologievorlesung (1908/09)*, p. 269.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 270-272.

<sup>4</sup> M. Properzi, *Il giovane Scheler e l'epistemologia*, *Dialegesthai. Rivista di Filosofia*, Vol. 20, 2018, <https://mondodomani.org/dialegesthai/mpr01.htm>.

<sup>5</sup> B. Dayrat, *The Roots of Phylogeny*, pp. 515-517.

Scheler insists on the point that if biological varieties can be explained through adaptive dynamics, the same does not happen at the species level, contrary to what both Haeckelian and (neo) Darwinian/(neo) Lamarckian models assume. In fact, according to Scheler, the adaptive dynamics, understood as evolutionary-causal factors, must be integrated with metaphysical factors: in a general context of eidetic analysis of the vital form, it would then be possible to justify the specific biological organisation on a level that does not concern simply its current realisation but every possible manifestation more in general.<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this article it is interesting to note how Scheler connects a critique of the epistemological theories of Kant, Spencer and the pragmatist William James to this line of argument. In his opinion, in fact, starting from wrong or inaccurate representations of the relationship between the vital form and the bodily world, a relationship that we have seen implies essential connections for Scheler, these authors have misunderstood the concept of nature, specifically its interpretation within what we will learn to know as the worldview of modern science.<sup>2</sup>

## 2.2 “Phenomenology of life and of the organic event”

From the point of view of the topics covered, the third section of *Biologievorlesung* (1908/09) is much more organic than the first, which is why the analysis conducted here reaches a level of detail that cannot be found anywhere else in the text. Although the title reads “Phenomenology of life and of the organic event” (*Phänomenologie des Lebens und organischen Geschehens*), three of the four subsections in which the section has been organised are devoted to a descriptive analysis of the movement (*Bewegung*) and of the transformation of state (*Zustandsänderung*) understood as modifications of a fundamental characteristic concerning the event (*das Geschehens*), regardless of its characterisation as a physical or organic event: that is, change (*Wechsel*).

In the first subsection (*Bewegung* [*Wechsel, Bewegung, Veränderung*]), Scheler distinguishes the event in general from the organic event; he specifies the relationship between change, movement and transformation of state, starting the analysis in critical contrast to the positions of Kant, Bergson and of the French mathematician and theoretical physicist Henri Poincaré. The event, Scheler explains, is the object that “changes”: it corresponds to a state of affairs inserted in the orders of temporality and spatiality, which is assumed in the

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<sup>1</sup> M. Scheler, *Biologievorlesung* (1908/09), pp. 273-283.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 275-279.

experience of change and, therefore, of the event. The organic event shows (*aufweist*) the living being as it is objectified — precisely in the event — by an act of external perception.<sup>1</sup> The change is not described. Scheler limits himself to indicating the type of experience that reveals it to us, i.e. the experience of the indistinction of movement and transformation of state. This is experienced, for example, when you look at a display case teeming with fish or objects that are illuminated intermittently.<sup>2</sup> Movement and transformation of state are, instead, described as modifications of change. The first is, in fact, a reversible change; the second, in contrast, is an irreversible change. Reversibility and its opposite indicate here the possibility or, in other terms, the impossibility that the event summarises the configuration initially experienced both in the order of spatiality (reversibility) and in that of temporality (irreversibility). According to Scheler, Kant grasped these eidetic data by making a series of distinctions, which, however, were not clearly expressed since they were affected by a formulation that was still too rooted in the empirical data.<sup>3</sup> Bergson, on the one hand, makes the mistake of reducing the movement to the transformation of state, while Poincaré, on the other hand, does not even make the distinction between the modifications of the event.<sup>4</sup>

The considerations made in the first subsection are picked up and further detailed in the next two subsections. Of greater interest is the former, in which Scheler identifies three “cognitive components” of the movement that are independent of its characterisation as an organic or inorganic movement: the immediate or mediated identification (*Identifikation*) of the moving object, the continuity (*Kontinuität*) of the displacement and the tendency (*Tendenz*) or agency. He shows that the necessary condition for movement as a lived change is the co-existence of at least two of the aforementioned cognitive components, from which it is possible to derive the third. For example, tendency is derivable from the giving of identification and continuity.<sup>5</sup> Here we find developed an aspect of the analysis of tendency that Scheler does not deal with in the first chapter of *Formalismus*, where he describes the data in the more general terms of any lived experience, therefore with reference also but not only to motor intentionality.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 314.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 315.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 315-316.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 316-317.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 318.

<sup>6</sup> M. Scheler, *Formalism in Ethics*, pp. 30-44.

Like the subsection dedicated to the cognitive components of movement, the third subsection (*Zusatz zu Bewegung und Zustandsänderung*) is suddenly interrupted, perhaps due to the loss of material. However, its final part is of considerable interest. Scheler addresses the analysis of orientation (*Richtung*) as a character that gives “substance” to the movement. According to the author, a movement is concrete when it is oriented: the experience of orientation depends on the transformation of the state of the object in movement, therefore, as it is explained, on the connection between a certain quality of the object and one of the spatial *loci* that this occupies in a continuous motion.<sup>1</sup> Also in the case of orientation, in *Biologievorlesung (1908/09)* Scheler specifies the description of a datum that in the first chapter of the *Formalismus* is examined at a more general level, i.e. the level of the qualification imposed by the orientation to the different lived tendencies.<sup>2</sup>

The fourth and final subsection (*Bewegung als Tatbestand im Lebensphänomen*) deals with the motion and transformation of state as vital phenomena. As for motion, Scheler describes it as a genus of tendential shift, in which the change in position (shift) is experienced as a result of a tendency. The author also notes how organic movement is a unitary figure preceding the distinction between physical and psychic.<sup>3</sup> Here the critical reference seems to be the psycho-physics of Gustav Theodor Fechner: as experienced, Scheler specifies, the movement is not the result of an operation of mental coordination directed to an external percept, for example the vision of the movement of my hand, and directed to an emotional internal experience, for example the kinesis generated by the movement of the hand. In the experience of movement “external” and “internal” are directions immediately identified by the experimenter. This also applies in the case of a malfunction of the systems and organs involved in the actual exercise of motor behaviour. At this point Scheler faces a topic that will be more central in his subsequent production: the experience of resistance (*Widerstand*). In *Biologievorlesung (1908/09)* Scheler describes resistance as the phenomenon behind the idea of otherness, of being something else, unlike what he will assert in slightly later writings, such as *reine Tatsache und Kausalbeziehung (Phänomenologie und Kausalerklärung)*, which date back to the two-year period 1911-1912, in which a more circumscribed eidetic datum is developed, i.e. that of reality.<sup>4</sup> In the lived movement “we experience

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<sup>1</sup> M. Scheler, *Biologievorlesung (1908/09)*, p. 323.

<sup>2</sup> M. Scheler, *Formalism in Ethics*, pp. 30-44.

<sup>3</sup> M. Scheler, *Biologievorlesung (1908/09)*, p. 325.

<sup>4</sup> M. Properzi, *Materia e forma nella prima estetica fenomenologica di Max Scheler*, in: *Rivista internazionale di filosofia e psicologia*, Vol. 9, n. 2, 2018, pp. 162-177.

a positive phenomenon, that of “resistance”, which outside as within the living body is exactly the same phenomenon and again has nothing to do with sensation. The fact, however, that we experience it and that in principle we can experience the “other”, assumes our capacity to immediately identify it as an act that is indifferent to the forms of external and internal perception”.<sup>1</sup> From this analysis Scheler draws the distinction between perception of oneself (*Selbstwahrnehmung*) and perception of the other (*Fremdwahrnehmung*) as a distinction indifferent to that between the two fundamental directions of subjective experience, the external direction that gives access to the physical being and the internal direction, which gives access to the psychic being. This passage testifies how already in 1908-1909 Scheler started the elaboration of a thematic core, which will then be crucial for the theory of intersubjectivity set out in the appendix to *Zur Phänomenologie und Theorie der Sympathiegefühle von Liebe und Haß* (1913), in which he criticises the approach to the experience of the alter ego based on the reasoning by analogy proposed, among others, by Theodor Lipps.

The section concludes with the analysis of the vital force (*Lebenskraft*) and of the tendency and transformation of state as phenomenological foundations, respectively, of the mechanical concept of force, of the mechanical concept of time and of the thermodynamic concepts of conservation of the quantity of energy and entropy. Regarding the transformation of state, Scheler identifies four essential properties:

1) The independence from the external physical transformations of state that only “concretely [...] can affect the transformation of the state of the organism”.<sup>2</sup>

2) The growth for which the transformation is qualitative and “does not require any specific energy contribution”.<sup>3</sup>

3) The individuality for which the transformation is global and does not modify the state “in the way of the sum of the transformations of state of its parts”.<sup>4</sup>

4) The complexity by which organism and species transform together and the state does not change “at a given moment uniquely determined by means of its previous state + the state of the inanimate environment”.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> M. Scheler, *Biologievorlesung (1908/09)*, p. 325.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 342.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 343.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

As noted by the author, these four properties are compatible with the essence of the transformation of state, which we have seen coincide with the irreversibility of change.<sup>1</sup>

### 2.3 “Instinctive movements”

The fourth section of *Biologievorlesung (1908/09)* deals with the themes of instinctive movement and instinct, which are considered by Scheler as central themes for the philosophy of biology, the principles of which can, in fact, be clarified by a descriptive analysis of instinctive movement, as he observes citing a series of contemporary publications including *L'évolution créatrice* by Bergson and the *Principles of Psychology* by William James.<sup>2</sup> The starting point of Scheler's analysis is the identification of instinctive movement and animal movement implicit in the ordinary linguistic use of the expression “instinctive movement”. This identification proves to be wrong in the light of scientific evidence that attributes an instinctive character to certain expressions of human knowing and acting, as well as to certain abilities for learning, choice and intelligence in animals. Scheler critically discusses two concepts of instinctive movement: the one that leads it to the drive, supported, among others, by Wilhelm Wundt, and the one that leads it to the reflex, citing Spencer among its most prominent exponents. Both of these views are rejected as being reductionist. More specifically, Scheler shows how, unlike the drive, instinct arises from a *conatus* intrinsic to the nature of the agent: its behavioural expression is a functional and not habitual movement. This movement has a unitary purpose, unlike the reflex, which is a reaction to local stimuli that operate on certain parts of the organic body.<sup>3</sup> In this thematic context, Scheler criticises the position of the physiologist Jacques Loeb, who interprets instinct as a chain of reflexes without a stimulatory *locus*.

The section ends with two reflections. Scheler first identifies an essential link between instinct and the vital form: different instincts correspond to the different stages of formation of the organisms, which, therefore, change according to the form.<sup>4</sup> Second, considering instinctive movement as a component also of human behaviour, the author mentions the characteristics of

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 343-347.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 354.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 355-356.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 358-359.

control, purpose and automatism, insisting on the point that instinct is a type of knowledge and action that is independent in its modalities of exercise by the intelligence that distinguishes *sapiens* from other living beings. As he will explain more fully in the 1913 article *Zur Idee des Menschen*, the development of intelligence and intellectual knowledge in *sapiens* is inversely proportional to the regression of instinct, understood as an operative knowledge contextual to the adaptive dynamics that involve the organism and its surrounding environment.<sup>1</sup>

### **3. “Biology and physics”: the critical project of ontology of science in *Biologievorlesung* (1908/09)**

The analysis carried out in the previous paragraph gives us a slightly incoherent picture, in which the comparison with contemporary scientific production and, to a lesser extent, with the Western philosophical tradition is the key that provides Scheler with the opportunity to first attempt to investigate eidetics applied to the biological field. In *Biologievorlesung* (1908/09) this investigation is addressed with a certain level of detail only in the third section. More in general, however, Scheler's analysis seems to lack a basic organic structure, a lack that may be perceived as being largely due to the fragmentary nature of the text — which, moreover, consists of mere notes of the lectures not even re-elaborated by the author. Even following a careful analysis of the text there seems to be a lack of a common thread linking the first and last two sections of the text. In other words: how does Scheler intend to connect the concept of object form and, specifically, that of vital form discussed in the first section to the phenomenology of the organic event, of life and of instinctive movements outlined in the last two sections?

In the absence of explanations from the author, it is legitimate to put forward some interpretative hypotheses. In this respect, in the light of what was observed at the opening of § 2.1, it seems appropriate to focus the reader's attention on the concept of organic event. In fact, Scheler dedicates the third section of the text almost entirely to the description of this concept. Revealing itself as an event, life somehow reaches a reality as an object organised by the intuitive forms of temporality and spatiality. Perhaps, is the vital form, which is objectified in the perception of the organic event, a peculiar space-time formation? In examining the first section of *Biologievorlesung* (1908/09) we did not encounter definitions of the vital form. To tell the truth, it is the entire text

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 360-361.

that does not provide explanations on the matter. Nevertheless, reading the second section seems to me to give interesting insights, especially when focusing on the systematic key presented in the introduction to this article. In fact, by reconstructing the way in which Scheler rethinks about certain epistemological issues in terms of the ontology of scientific knowledge, an ontology that the author elaborates on an eidetic level, it is possible to understand how he describes the formal component of the event not in terms of space and time but in terms of “variation” (*Variation*), of which the former are genera. The variation in the organic event is not described in *Biologievorlesung (1908/09)*. It is, however, described in some passages of the *Formalismus*, which will, therefore, be useful to recall. Instead, what is (relatively) well explained in *Biologievorlesung (1908/09)* is the path followed by the author to grasp the form of the event. This path includes the distinction between pure sciences and empirical sciences, specifically between logic and mechanics, which Scheler bases on (the distinction between) the activity of reason and intellect, respectively, interpreted in the light of the corresponding object constitution. With the aim of reconstructing this path, in what follows my interpretation, at a certain point I will break free from the type of approach, pursued up to now, of simply reading and interpreting the text, focused on restoring the original thematic and argumentative progression.

### 3.1 *Mechanics, modernity and technical civilisation*

The second section of *Biologievorlesung (1908/09)* starts with the formulation of two crucial issues to set out the discussion of the general theme of the section, i.e. the relationship between scientific method and ontology. In the light of a phenomenological foundation, Scheler wonders: to what extent is the object of physical science conditioned by life? Conversely, to what extent can life be explained in physical terms?<sup>1</sup> The two issues are initially addressed by opposing the conceptual system of physical disciplines and of biological disciplines: physical science uses concepts that are of a quantitative nature; biological science, instead, uses qualitative concepts. Arguing in favour of the mutual irreducibility of the two conceptual systems, Scheler criticises as reductionist the position defended by authors, such as Bergson and William Stern, for whom physical quantities are interpretable in the light of the biological concepts of quality and individuality. However, to interpret the conceptual system underlying a given discipline in absolute terms is a *modus operandi*

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 285.

that Scheler criticises not only in the biological epistemology of the aforementioned authors but also and, above all, in the discipline of mechanics. According to Scheler, the representatives of this discipline, which was born in the modern age, promote a reductionism that is opposite to that of Bergson and Stern, in which extra-mechanical quantitative concepts are descriptive of mechanical concepts through the application of measures of mass and motion in the calculation of values, for example of the electromagnetic field and of thermal energy.<sup>1</sup>

Mechanistic reductionism is placed by Scheler in the context of a certain phase of the historical development of physical science, which coincides with the modern age. The connection between the primacy of mechanical explanation and modernity is not addressed by the author on a historiographical level, since it is indeed made explicit following an argumentative path that is divided into two passages. The first of these consists in highlighting the essential link that connects the mechanical explanation of natural phenomena and the general function of perception (*spüren*) proper of the organism as such. The second coincides with showing the epistemological relevance of the aforementioned link. Starting from the first, mechanics proposes an explanation of natural phenomena, which is centred on the measurement of movement, focusing in fact on the motion of the body masses. The centrality attributed by mechanics to motion is for Scheler nothing more than an ideal quantitative expression through the adoption of the symbolic language of mathematical geometry of the centrality that movement has in the sensoriality of organisms, therefore in the way in which these adapt to their own surrounding environment.<sup>2</sup> The essential link that connects mechanical explanation and the function of perception, therefore, concerns the maintenance at the basis of the mechanical explanation of the adaptive logic regulating every expression of organic perception. Here a path begins that, we will see, will lead Scheler already in *Biologievorlesung (1908/09)* to overturn the relationship between common sense

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 287.

<sup>2</sup> In *Biologievorlesung (1908/09)* Scheler seems to understand movement and growth under a single interpretative key, thus not encountering any difficulty in dealing with general organic functions shared between the plant and animal kingdoms. This allows him, for example, to speak of movement also as regards the vegetable kingdom. The reference is to the tropism of some plants, which Scheler understands as a form of geo- and photo-induced motility. During the 1920s, the author reviews his position concerning the centrality of movement as an elementary organic function. In *Die Stellung des Menschen in Kosmos*, growth (*Hineinwachsen*) takes the place of movement: the two functions are presented as undifferentiated only as regards the plant kingdom. See M. Properzi, *Materia e Forma*, pp. 174-175.

and science set up in the modern age by authors, such as Galileo, Descartes, Boyle and Locke on the basis of the distinction between primary or innate qualities and secondary qualities, or qualities relating to the perceiver of bodies, where the former are notoriously of a mathematical nature and are, therefore, properties that are quantifiable and measurable. For now, it is necessary to limit ourselves to observing how, according to Scheler, the identification of the essential link between mechanical explanation and the function of perception allows us to answer the question concerning the extension of the conditioning exerted by the biology of the acquainted on physical science. The latter is conditioned “certainly not by the forms and types of sensory apparatus, nor by its peculiar structure, nor by the modes of sensory functions [...] Mechanics, however, is involved in an essential link with the function of perception”.<sup>1</sup>

The second passage assumes what has been said thus far and reveals its effects at the epistemological level. If it is true, as has been demonstrated, that mechanics has had a decisive impact on the elaboration of the scientific method, i.e. the hypothetical-deductive method, then the adaptive logic underlying the mechanical explanation regulates, to a certain extent, all kinds of scientific explanations. According to Scheler, this is clear if one reflects on its predictive purpose. Starting from hypotheses, in fact, the scientific explanation aims to predict events occurring in nature. It thus expresses a tendency to control nature in a highly idealised form, which is characteristic of the *sapiens*.<sup>2</sup> Or in other words, as Scheler has interest to point out, a tendency to control that is characteristic of *sapiens* as a biological species in which civilisation has largely replaced natural evolution. Language and, more in general, culture have been placed at the service of survival and improvement of the living conditions of the members of the species. For Scheler, therefore, the scientific prediction of natural events is nothing more than a declination of the tendency to control nature that the human being has developed during the course of its evolution as an organism exposed to the selective pressure deriving from the non-constant availability of environmental resources. Unlike other organisms, the main adaptive tool of the human being is not organic evolution (i.e. the modification of the genetic, functional and/or anatomical-morphological organisation of the body) but the development of culture. Scheler insists on technical culture, where the production of increasingly refined artifacts also serves — but not only — that specific declination of the tendency to control nature that is typical of modern science.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> M. Scheler, *Biologievorlesung (1908/09)*, p. 287.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 291.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 291-295.

As previously anticipated, Scheler's investigation is not limited here to establishing a connection between mechanics, more generally science, modernity and technical civilisation, but aims to reconstruct, through a phenomenological description, the way in which the scientific object is constituted. To assert that the scientific explanation uses a method on the basis of which it is possible to predict the course of natural events is not enough. It is, in fact, necessary to understand how this happens and this, according to Scheler, is possible by describing the constitutive processes of synthesis or object identification, typical of science. So, let's try to reconstruct this aspect of the Schelerian investigation as well.

### 3.2 *The sign character of intellectual knowledge*

In *Biologievorlesung (1908/09)* Scheler does not make a clear distinction between pure sciences and empirical sciences, dealing almost exclusively with the latter (biological sciences, physical sciences, chemical sciences, etc.). However, in some passages of the second section he refers to logic, which is described as a pure and rational science.<sup>1</sup> For Scheler, who has not yet elaborated his own concept of person, which was only dealt with extensively for the first time in the second part of *Formalismus (1916)*, reason consists in the complex of spiritual acts and, understood as theoretical reason, it expresses a type of knowledge that is pure, apodictic, founded on truth. As he will explain to us in subsequent writings, for example in *Die Idole der Selbsterkenntnis*, truth coincides with the predicative articulation of eidetic evidence, an articulation that occurs in the act of judging. In the second section of *Biologievorlesung (1908/09)*, alongside the logic/reason pair, Scheler introduces the natural science of mechanics/intellect pair.<sup>2</sup> Unlike reason, intellect consists not only of spiritual acts but also of acts of choice (*Akten der Wahl*). The choice evaluates and, by evaluating, it selects portions of truth on which the interest of the acquainted focuses because these have been given a (new) axiological meaning described by Scheler under the category of utility value. We thus have new units of meaning: functional means to achieve a purpose defined contextually to the behaviour performed by the acquainted or purposes that underpin the behavioural functionality of the mean.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 291.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 291-292.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 292.

Understood as a distinction between reason and intellect, the distinction between pure sciences and empirical sciences is one that acquires an oppositional nature in the text. Crucial in this sense is the introduction of a new conceptual pair, the intuition/sign pair. As for intuition, Scheler speaks here of “*Anschau*”, a terminological choice that makes explicit his referring to the type of eidetic intuition typical of phenomenology. A confirmation of this occurs where he identifies a sensorial component not in intuition *tout court* — which, in fact, as an eidetic intuition, foresees an active role for imagination, not for sensoriality —, but in intuitive knowledge where the idea is inserted within a relationship of validation or fulfilment that also involves judgment and, through the mediation of the sensory functions that allow its cognitive representation, the thing (*Ding*) is understood as an extra-intentional existing reality. According to what Scheler explains to us, where present, this sensory component of intuitive knowledge “only has the purpose of providing signs to our movements and actions, which allow us to behave in a certain way”.<sup>1</sup> Thus, as opposed to eidetic intuition, intuitive knowledge maintains a relationship with reality that is mediated by the senses, which represent us the thing by virtue of a transmission function that lies behind the sensory content itself. This, of course, is interpreted within the framework of behavioural dynamics. The sensation-sign (or sensation-index) with its semantic relations thus structures what we could indicate as a sensorimotor knowledge of the thing. The intellect provides this type of knowledge, whose “law of direction” (*Richtungsgesetz*), i.e. whose directionality to reality, is “idealised” (*idealisiert*) and “absolutized” (*verabsolutiert*) in the mechanical explanation and, more in general, in the empirical-scientific one.<sup>2</sup>

Let us focus now on the constitution of the thing, leaving aside for the moment the issue of the idealisation/absolutisation of the law of direction of intellectual knowledge, a point that I intend to pick up in the next paragraph since it represents, in my opinion, a crucial point to understand the re-elaboration to which Scheler submits the relationship between common sense and science in an anti-modern way. In this respect, Scheler carries out a very detailed analysis in the second section of *Biologievorlesung (1908/09)*. The first aspect of Schelerian analysis that I would like to recall is the foundational relationship established between idea (or essence) and identification. The author observes that the idea understood as an eidetic object satisfies the principle of identity and that, like any kind of relationship, also the identification, for example that of the thing as an object of intellectual knowledge, implies the identity of the

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 293.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 294.

idea. As he quotes: “Identifiability belongs to the essence of the object. Identity is not a ‘relationship’. Rather, relations are themselves a certain category of objects”.<sup>1</sup> The sense of the foundational implication that Scheler seems to have in mind here is that of a whole whose existence is necessary for its parts to exist. In writings subsequent to the text here, Scheler rarely refers to the formal structure of whole-parts (mereology) that Husserl introduces in the third logical research. Nevertheless, in the passages we are examining, the portions of the idea selected in the context of the validation report seem to be traced back to parts of a whole. The being of this whole must be presupposed, i.e. it is necessary for it to be so that the (foundational implication) is also the being of its selected parts.<sup>2</sup>

If we consider a second aspect of Scheler's analysis, we see how the foundational implication just mentioned above serves the author to clarify how the relations of the sign operate in identifying the intellectual object. Behind the immediate giving of the thing, they construct equalities and similarities between phenomenal objects, that is, instantiations of the given quality as sensory content. As the author explains:

It is not necessary that similar representations must have resided in consciousness for the so-called reproduction by similarity to be achieved [...] For this it is sufficient rather that a thing A (for example a red stone sphere) has been given to the individual in any phenomenon (visual content red sphere) that has activated certain stimuli and nervous processes  $r_\alpha$  in him/her; and that a thing B (another shade of red and larger glass sphere), which is objectively similar to A, partially exerts the same stimuli as  $r_{\alpha\beta}$ : thus a phenomenon will be given to the individual, which in the phenomenon is identical to  $\alpha$ . That is, effective similarity does not exist between phenomena (representations), but between things.<sup>3</sup>

Based on this, Scheler criticises the position of the Neo-Kantian Hans Cornelius, and that of contemporary associationist psychology, showing, in particular, how the consciousness of the construction of similarity (*Ähnlichkeitsbewußtsein*) between phenomenal objects — the sphere of red stone, to resume the same example made by Scheler — arises when the founding identity — that of the ideas of the sphere, of the stone and of the red colour — is hidden (*unterdrückt*) because it is not intended by the acquainted. Constructive con-

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 289.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 289-291.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 300-301.

consciousness is, therefore, in reality a consciousness that dissociates (*Dissoziation*) qualities originally linked together. For example, the different shades of red that the acquainted sees in a stone sphere.<sup>1</sup>

### *3.3 Scientific explanation and the natural worldview: the scientific processes of idealisation and absolutisation of the law of direction of intellectual knowledge*

In the previous paragraph we discussed the law of direction of intellectual knowledge as well as the particular method on which it is based and underlined how, according to Scheler, there are two processes, namely the processes of idealisation and absolutisation, by which this law becomes normative at the level of scientific explanation. In order to deepen Scheler's argument of these processes, it is necessary to take a step back and go back to the subjective moment of choice, which is indicated by the author as a distinctive feature of intellectual knowledge compared to rational knowledge.

In this respect, the second section of *Biologievorlesung (1908/09)* provides a key concept, that of the *Hinsicht*. Scheler identifies three components in this concept: a cognitive component, a subjective component and a choice component, although he describes it as an objective concept. The *Hinsicht* is, in fact, a relationship — and we have seen how relationships for Scheler belong to the category of the object: the genus to which *Hinsicht* belongs to is that of cognitive relationships, since it is an intentional relationship with a subjective pole and an objective pole. Its specific feature is the choice of the object, determined by consciousness.<sup>2</sup> From a phenomenological point of view, the *Hinsicht* is what common sense and science have in common: it is the intentional relationship based on the identity of an idea necessarily preceding the acquainted (for example, as a whole is with respect to its parts). It is structured according to all those moments of intellectual knowledge that we have mentioned thus far: the spiritual acts and correlated eidetic objects, the behavioural interest, the selection of portions of the idea understood as true, their utilitarian evaluation, the sensorial representation of the meanings selected and evaluated, their sign synthesis in the object-thing of perceptive-motor knowledge, which is proper to the intellect. How do the processes of idealisation and absolutisation work on the *Hinsicht*? As far as we know, they concern the law of

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 298-302.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 289-290.

direction of intellectual knowledge, therefore the moment of the sign synthesis of the real object.

The process of idealisation concerns the level of being of the object, which, in the scientific explanation, coincides with the states of things that can be instantiated in individual cosal carriers. Let's take the increase in pressure, thus the decrease in volume, in a gas as an example: when reproduced in a given experimental situation, the state of affairs can be observed in *this* single gas manipulated during the experiment by the researcher.<sup>1</sup> To idealise the object of intellectual knowledge understood as sensorimotor knowledge thus means to replace the state of things with the thing in the sign synthesis. This substitution takes place thanks to the use of the mathematical symbol that generalises the postponement function of the sensation-sign. In *Lehre von den drei Tatsachen* Scheler will speak of a "scientific reduction" (*wissenschaftliche Reduktion*), which affects the cosal reference of the sign.<sup>2</sup> The process of absolutisation follows that of idealisation. Thanks to the adoption of mathematical symbolism, the scientist has available a generalised functional principle that makes the natural event independent ("absolutises") from its real existence, which is now interpreted as only one of the possible instantiations of the state of affairs of which the natural event is the bearer (regardless of its real existence).<sup>3</sup>

On the basis of this description of the processes of idealisation and absolutisation, Scheler overturns the modern position regarding the relationship between common sense and science. As he asserts:

We deny again that the attempt to bring nature back to mechanical legality can in some way be called a success of the "rational intellect" as pure intellect and that, therefore, mechanical causality returns the true image of nature. The mechanical view of nature [...] is rather just the idealisation and absolutisation of a form of understanding that is already active in the natural worldview.<sup>4</sup>

Since the early years of the twentieth century, the author will adopt the expression *wissenschaftliche Weltanschauung* to refer to the mechanical vision of nature (*mechanische Naturansicht*), which is at the basis of the ontologies developed in the various disciplines and in the various disciplinary sectors of modern science. The terminological transition just mentioned reflects a path of the reflection that Scheler matured during the first decade of the century, by

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 304.

<sup>2</sup> M. Scheler, *The Theory of the Three Facts*, p. 253.

<sup>3</sup> M. Scheler, *Biologievorlesung (1908/09)*, p. 305.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 307.

confronting himself with the interpretation and use of the concept of worldview by authors, such as Dilthey, Gomperz and von Humboldt.<sup>1</sup> This path of reflection will lead the author to identify different categorical systems at the basis of common sense and science.<sup>2</sup>

#### 4. Conclusions

In this article I have proposed a reading and interpretation of the text *Biologievorlesung (1908/09)* focusing my attention on two points: the demonstration of a thematic and argumentative continuity with other writings belonging to the first Schelerian phenomenological production and the highlighting of a critical project of eidetics of modern science still in the making, in which the author attempts to systematically interconnect the epistemological, ontological and phenomenological themes. As a conclusion of the proposed reading, I would like to draw the reader's attention to the way in which Scheler treats the form of the event, the variation (*Variation*), in *Biologievorlesung (1908/09)* compared to the way in which he presents the form of the organic event in *Formalismus*. As already mentioned, in fact, it is not possible to find in *Biologievorlesung (1908/09)* any passage in which the variation of the organic event is discussed, although it represents the real *trait d'union* between the four sections of the text.

According to the Scheler of *Biologievorlesung (1908/09)*, the form of the event, the variation (*Variation*), belongs to the categories of pure logic, since it in-forms every kind of change, be it movement or transformation of state.<sup>3</sup> It is defined as the possibility of replacing an object with another object in reference to the same identity, that of the idea or essence. The variation contains the moment of being-other, the "idea of otherness" (*Idee der Andersheit*), together with an act of becoming-other (*anderswerden*) in which, the author specifies, "there is no trace of time".<sup>4</sup> It doesn't even foresee the

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<sup>1</sup> After 1921, the author's main term of comparison regarding the interpretation and use of the concept of worldview became Max Weber and his school. See: M. Scheler, *Weltanschauungslehre, Soziologie und Weltanschauungssetzung*, in: *Gesammelte Werke*, Vol. VI, edited by M. Scheu Scheler, Bern-München, Francke, 1963, pp. 13-27.

<sup>2</sup> M. Scheler, *The Nature of Philosophy*, p. 96.

<sup>3</sup> M. Scheler, *Biologievorlesung (1908/09)*, p. 289.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 290.

concept of function, which is, in fact, a specific kind of dependence established between a multiplicity of becoming-other.<sup>1</sup>

In *Formalismus*, Scheler connects stimulus and variation. As he asserts:

The “stimulus” is only what changes the states of the body-proper and that transforms a series of reactions in the living being in variation. Even the objective concept of stimulus [...] must always *be connected to the unity of the body-proper* and to its variations.<sup>2</sup>

As a form of the organic event, which is activated by an action of the external stimulus as experienced at the level of body consciousness, the variation is described by the author as “constitutive for the essence of the vital process”, which, in fact, consists “in the process of the *dynamic variations* that condition *both* the modifications of the organism *and* those of the environment”.<sup>3</sup> What is lacking in *Biologievorlesung (1908/09)* is, therefore, not only an adequate treatment of the vital form but also a phenomenology of the stimulatory experience, which, according to what we have just seen, Scheler will subsequently treat in close connection with the first.

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 290-291.

<sup>2</sup> M. Scheler, *Formalism in Ethics*, p. 153.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 153-154.

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