

The “*Lebensproblem*” and its Critical Solution: A Systematic Reading of Max Scheler’s *Biologie-Vorlesung* 1926-1927

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Abstract To date, the collection of texts, known as *Biologie-Vorlesung*, is still an editorial work in progress. The intention of the editors is to provide the reader with a complete edition of the notes of the latest lecture on theoretical biology held by the German phenomenologist Max Scheler at the University of Cologne during the winter semester of the academic year 1926-1927. Of the six notebooks that make up the surviving fragments of the notes of the lecture, only the first and the second notebook have been fully published, together with some brief extracts from the third and the fifth notebook. Despite some relevant results achieved in the philological interpretation of the text, no systematic interpretation of Scheler’s *Biologie-Vorlesung* has been provided to date. My aim here is to fill such a hermeneutical gap by following two strictly inter-related interpretative lines. More specifically: 1) a text-based comparison between *Biologie-Vorlesung* and the so-called *Biologievorlesung* (1908/09), the edited version of the notes elaborated by Scheler for the first Munich lecture on theoretical biology dating back to 1908-1909, and 2) a reconstruction of the critical project of a phenomenology-driven philosophy of life, which is unfortunately only enunciated in *Biologie-Vorlesung*. I will stress the interrelation between these two interpretative lines. This interrelation may be seen as an attempt to highlight some aspects of continuity and discontinuity in Scheler’s lifelong proposal regarding the critical character of a phenomenological philosophy of life phenomena based on a theory of categories of biological sciences, which is highly sensitive to historical and sociocultural concerns. As I

will show, according to the Schelerian interpretation, this means that the phenomenologist must justify or validate the categorial system adopted in a specific historical and sociocultural context, e.g., in the Modern Western culture, from which positive sciences originated. Despite this aspect of continuity, Scheler's late critical project stands out for the need of a more structured character. According to my view, this character basically depends on the interplay between the phenomenological and the metaphysical theme established by the author through the theory of metasciences, whose aim is to achieve a critical knowledge regarding both the being of essence and the being of existence of the scientific objects, among the other objects of biological sciences.

Keywords Scheler, *Biologie-Vorlesung*, philosophy of life, critical phenomenology, theory of categories, biological knowledge, metaphysics, limit problems.

1. Introduction

To date, the collection of texts, known as *Biologie-Vorlesung*, is still an editorial work in progress. The intention of the editors is to provide the reader with a complete edition of the notes of the latest lecture on theoretical biology held by the German phenomenologist Max Scheler at the University of Cologne during the winter semester of the academic year 1926-1927. The lecture was entitled *Das Wesen der Lebenserscheinungen* ("The essence of life phenomena") and took place three times a week (on Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays) from 10 to 11 a.m. Of the six notebooks that make up the surviving fragments of the notes of the lecture, only the first and the second notebook have been fully published, together with some brief extracts from the third and the fifth notebook. The first notebook appeared in 1979 in Vol. XI of Scheler's collected works edited by M. S. Frings. In this volume two brief extracts from the fifth notebook that bear the name of *Drangphantasie* and *Dysteleologie und Teleologie* were also included.¹ Another extract from the third notebook

¹ M. Scheler, *Manuskripte zur Lehre vom Grunde aller Dinge*, in: M. Scheler, *Gesammelte Werke*, Vol. XI, edited by M.S. Frings, Francke, Bern-München 1979, pp. 185-222, pp. 189, 196. As regards the first notebook, see: M. Scheler, *Manuskripte zu den Metaszienzen*, in: M. Scheler, *Gesammelte Werke*, Vol. XI, *op. cit.*, pp. 125-184, 164-184.

is currently contained in Vol. XII.¹ In contrast to the materials just cited, the second notebook did not come out from Scheler's collected works since it was edited by W. Henckmann in a separated book.²

Despite some relevant results achieved in the philological interpretation of the text, no systematic interpretation of Scheler's *Biologie-Vorlesung* has been provided to date. As noticed by Henckmann, however, this kind of interpretation is highly recommended. According to the scholar, this interpretation should be conducted in the direction of highlighting themes, methods and concepts that crosscut both the late Cologne lecture and the first Munich lecture on theoretical biology. The latter dates to 1908-1909. A comparison between the two lectures based on shared and unshared theoretical, methodological and conceptual positions could allow a deep understanding of the intellectual genesis of *Biologie-Vorlesung* in the context of Scheler's lifelong reflection on the subject matter of biology. The Munich lecture was edited under the title *Biologievorlesung (1908/09)* in Vol. XIV of Scheler's collected works.³ I extensively discussed the text in a previous article published in this journal.⁴ I will thus limit myself now to just recall the relevant passages that I consider useful to clarify the texts of *Biologie-Vorlesung* in a systematic way.

More precisely, my aim here is to fill the aforementioned hermeneutical gap by following two strictly interrelated interpretative lines: 1) a text-based comparison between *Biologie-Vorlesung* and *Biologievorlesung (1908/09)*, and 2) a reconstruction of the critical project of a phenomenology-driven philosophy of life, which is unfortunately only enunciated in *Biologie-Vorlesung*. I will stress the interrelation between these two interpretative lines. This interrelation may be seen as an attempt to highlight some aspects of continuity and discontinuity in Scheler's lifelong proposal regarding the critical character of a phenomenological philosophy of life phenomena based on a theory of categories of biological sciences, which is highly sensitive to historical and socio-cultural concerns. As I will show, according to the Schelerian interpretation, this means that the phenomenologist must justify or validate the categorial

¹ M. Scheler, *Zur Konstitution des Menschen*, in: M. Scheler, *Gesammelte Werke*, Vol. XII, edited by M.S. Frings, Bouvier, Bonn 1987, pp. 119-205, 199.

² W. Henckmann, *Scheler's 'Biologie-Vorlesung' von 1926/1927*, in: D. Gottstein, H.R. Sepp (Eds.), *Polis und Kosmos. Perspektiven einer Philosophie des Politischen und einer philosophischen Kosmologie*, Königshausen & Neumann, Würzburg 2008, pp. 251-271.

³ M. Scheler, *Biologievorlesung (1908/09)*, in: M. Scheler, *Gesammelte Werke*, Vol. XIV, edited by M.S. Frings, Bouvier, Bonn 1993, pp. 257-367.

⁴ M. Properzi, *Max Scheler's Biologievorlesung 1908/09*, in: *Bulletin d'Analyse Phénoménologique*, Vol. 17, 2021, 7.

system adopted in a specific historical and sociocultural context, e.g., in the Modern Western culture, from which positive sciences originated. Despite this aspect of continuity, Scheler's late critical project stands out for the need of a more structured character. According to my view, this character basically depends on the interplay between the phenomenological and the metaphysical theme established by the author through the theory of metasciences, whose aim is to achieve a critical knowledge regarding both the being of essence and the being of existence of the scientific objects, among the other objects of biological sciences.

1.1 Structure of the article

The present article has the following structure: in § 2 I will analyse the first notebook of *Biologie-Vorlesung* and Section II of *Biologievorlesung (1908/09)*, following the elaboration of the critical project of a phenomenological philosophy of life, which is hereby pursued by the author, as a common thread. § 3 will be dedicated to a comparison between the second notebook of the 1926-1927 lecture and Section I and Section III of the 1908-1909 course. In this case, the analytical attention will be directed to Scheler's discussion of the biological categories. I will concentrate my attention on the category of vital form, which is discussed in both Schelerian texts, although according to different theoretical perspectives. Finally, in § 4, I will draw some conclusions from the systematic interpretation of *Biologie-Vorlesung* carried out in the previous paragraphs. These conclusions will concern the structural aspect of the critical project outlined in *Biologie-Vorlesung*. As anticipated, indeed, despite the centrality ascribed to the phenomenological theme, Scheler's late critical project distinguishes itself for placing his phenomenology of life phenomena in the context of a more comprehensive and internally articulated reflection on the role played by the philosophy of life within the general philosophy of being.

2. The critical project of a phenomenological philosophy of life: a text-based comparison between the first notebook of *Biologie-Vorlesung* and Section II of *Biologievorlesung (1908/09)*

The first notebook of *Biologie-Vorlesung* starts with a general overview of the structure and contents of the lecture. As stated by the author, its main objective is to offer “a characteristics as exact as possible of the state-of-the-art of the

issue that exists today for the problem of life (*Lebensproblem*), based on the enormous progress of the biological sciences and philosophy during the last years”.¹ The first part of the lecture, which is the only one addressed in the notebook, is dedicated to providing three kinds of knowledge. More specifically: 1) an essential or ideal knowledge directed to the types (*Typen*) of solutions of the issues concerning life. According to Scheler, these solutions must be considered together with their historical roots and processes. 2) A critical-phenomenological knowledge regarding the aforementioned solutions. This kind of knowledge is interpreted by the author as one able to highlight a foundational order of questions that are crucial to develop a philosophy of life. 3) A methodological knowledge interested in the understanding of the methods that were/are used for shaping life as a philosophical subject matter. In such a thematic context Scheler mentions the German biologist and natural philosopher Hans Driesch for the first time. As I will show in the next paragraph, Driesch’s work is the (main) target of the Schelerian criticism developed throughout the surviving fragments of the notes of the lecture.

Some clarifications may be worth the while regarding Scheler’s proposal. They may be conducted by highlighting the relevant differences with respect to the second section of *Biologievorlesung (1908/09)*, where Scheler attempted an articulation of the relationship among ontological, phenomenological and epistemological themes that is quite generic, if compared with the one suggested in *Biologie-Vorlesung*. In the 1908-1909 text, Scheler addressed some broad epistemological issues connected to the discipline of mechanics in terms of a critical ontology of the scientific knowledge, which he intended to elaborate by means of the toolkit of the so-called eidetics. Eidetics or, according to Scheler’s expression, the essential phenomenology of the object (*Wesensphänomenologie des Objekts*), overlaps with a descriptive analysis of the ideal unities of meaning (i.e., *eida*, ideas, essences) that structure an experienced object, interpreted as an instance of these ideas or essences.² For

¹ M. Scheler, *Manuskripte zu den Metaszienzen*, *op. cit.*, p. 164.

² Starting from the summer of 1907, Scheler participates as a speaker in the activities of the Academic Society of Psychology in Munich. This society became a centre of phenomenological discussion after an initial phase characterised by the influence of the psychologism of Lipps. The society is known as the Munich circle of realistic phenomenology: its members, including Scheler, advocate an object-oriented essential phenomenology (or otherwise a realistic phenomenology). Starting from this position, after 1913, they criticise Husserl’s interpretation of phenomenology as transcendental idealism. For a detailed presentation of the Munich circle of realistic phenomenology see: R.M. Smid, *Münchener Phänomenologie — Zur Frühgeschichte des Begriffs*, in: H. Spiegelberg, E. Avé-Lallemant (Eds.), *Pfänder-Studien*, Nijhoff, Den Haag 1982,

example, following the Schelerian focus on the discipline of mechanics, a physical body is experienced by the mechanical physicist as the bearer of measurable and hence explicable/predictable properties, basically the properties of mass and motion. These properties are grasped by the phenomenologist too, but according to the idea or essence that identifies the invariant or constant qualities of (mechanical) mass and motion.¹ The original aspect of Scheler's early object-oriented essential phenomenology of science coincides with its critical character. In other terms, it should be detected in the way in which this character is elaborated with reference to the mechanical explication and prediction of natural phenomena. Such an elaboration is realised in three argumentative steps: first, the historical and sociocultural contextualisation of science within the Modern Western culture. Second, the detection of the primacy of the category of motion, as a biological category, among other categories of scientific knowledge. Third, an interpretation of this primacy that traces the transcendental laws of its origin or genesis in the sensorimotor conditioning of the intellectualistic mindset, which is distinctive of Modern science. In other terms, according to the Schelerian proposal presented in *Biologievorlesung (1908/09)*, at least in its modern set up, science overlaps with an enterprise aiming at explaining and predicting natural phenomena through a mechanistic representation of the universe that generalises the central role of motility in the perceptual experience of the surrounding environment gained by the human being.²

pp. 109-154; G. Fréchette, *Phenomenology as Descriptive Psychology: The Munich Interpretation*, in: *Symposium: Canadian Journal of Continental Philosophy*, Vol. 16, n. 2, 2012, pp. 150-170.

¹ From a methodological point of view, eidetic or essential 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 meaning, which is analysed. The second operation shifts the analytical attention from the specific qualities of the imaginative variations to the idea or essence that identifies their invariant or constant qualities. The third operation allows one to abstract from the ideal matter and to concentrate the attention on the content-independent form of the essence. See: B. Smith, *Realistic Phenomenology*, in: L. Embree (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Phenomenology*, Springer, Dordrecht 1995, pp. 586-590.

² According to the terminology adopted in *Biologievorlesung (1908/09)*, the generalisation pursued by science overlaps with a process of idealisation and absolutisation of the law of direction of the (human) agent's practical knowledge. See: M. Properzi, *Max Scheler's Biologievorlesung, op. cit.*, pp. 27-29.

Now, the plan of the first part of the 1926-1927 lecture is clearly oriented towards the construction of a critical project of philosophy of life. In contrast to the proposal presented in the 1908-1909 lecture, however, the attention focuses on biological knowledge and on its historical development. More precisely, the eidetic description is here applied to a metatheoretical subject matter, namely to theories or systems of conceptualisation of life phenomena grasped as higher-level real objects. This original interpretation implies a core concept of Scheler's phenomenological philosophy, namely the concept of worldview (*Weltanschauung*), which allows to look at biological theories as cultural objects rooted in specific historical and social substrates. According to what I will be able to show in this paragraph, interpreted as cultural or higher-level real objects, biological theories are collected by Scheler in essential types of solutions of questions that regard the ontological region of life. As such, they reveal the strict interrelation among the ontological questions. Scheler speaks of an "*Ordnung*", of a foundational order according to which there are grounding and grounded questions. This foundational order follows a criterion of ontological entailment to which the author has often referred to in his published and unpublished works.¹ Accordingly, the critical project of a phenomenological philosophy of life pursued in *Biologie-Vorlesung* depends on the interplay between first- and higher-level theoretical constructions. As I will argue in this paragraph, the Schelerian late project involves also a gnoseological aspect. In the introductory remarks of the 1926-1927 notes of the lecture this aspect is not adequately presented. Indeed, it appears as a historiographical investigation into the methods elaborated for a philosophy of life.²

2.1 The essential typology of the theories of life

Scheler circumscribes the domain of the theories of life subjected to eidetic description. This domain includes contemporary philosophical theories that are approached by the author as expressions of forms of a historically and

¹ Scheler typically expresses the idea of a foundational order among essential or ideal unities as a genetic order of premises and consequences. See among other: M. Scheler, *Vom Wesen der Philosophie und die moralischen Bedingungen des philosophischen Erkennens*, in: M. Scheler, *Gesammelte Werke*, volume V, edited by M. Scheu Scheler, Francke, Bern-München 1954, pp. 61-101; Engl. transl. *The Nature of Philosophy and the Moral Preconditions of Philosophical Knowledge*, in: M. Scheler, *On the Eternal in Man*, edited by B. Noble, G. McAleer, Transaction Publisher, New Brunswick (NJ) 2010, pp. 66-104, 96.

² M. Scheler, *Manuskripte zu den Metaszienzen*, *op. cit.*, p. 164.

socio-culturally situated experience or “vision” (*Anschauung*) of the world, i.e., the so-called worldview (*Weltanschauung*). A relatively well-articulated definition of the concept of worldview is given in the general foreword of the 1923-1924 collection *Schriften zur Soziologie und Weltanschauungslehre*, where the concept is traced back to the interpretation provided by the German linguistic and philosopher Wilhelm von Humboldt. According to Scheler,

The title was chosen because almost all the works brought together in the volumes of the collection do not offer the defense of a worldview, but the clarification of the objective sense and of kinds of subjective position regarding given worldviews, which are still effective today — a word that here is not used for the naïve products of the so-called “philosophy of worldviews”, though in the sense of W. von Humboldt, its creator, namely as a name for the organic and historically becoming kind and way of seeing and evaluating the world, the soul and the life, which is pursued by broad unitary groups.¹

Both biological sciences and natural philosophy belong to these forms of vision.² The historical and sociocultural contextualisation of the scientific ontology operated through the notion of worldview is not a novelty in Scheler’s work. It represents indeed a core component of his early phenomenological philosophy of science. However, the novelty of the topic suggested in *Biologie-Vorlesung* consists in referring to a system of developmental laws that rule the forms of worldview. As stated by the author, “these forms are not by chance, being instead lawfully ordered. They equally follow 1. in the development of primitive man towards civilisation; 2. in the development of the man from child to adulthood; 3. in the development of natural theories within a specific culture (here, the Western culture)”.³ In the 1908-1909 lecture a relatively well-structured attempt was performed in relation to point 3 through the detection of the law of development of Modern science from common sense. Both, science and common sense, are framed as expressions of a form of worldview, i.e., the natural worldview (*natürliche Weltanschauung*).⁴ The

¹ M. Scheler, *Schriften zur Soziologie und Weltanschauungslehre*, in: M. Scheler, *Gesammelte Werke*, Vol. VI, edited by M. Scheu Scheler, Francke, Bern-München 1963, pp. 7-325, p. 8.

² M. Scheler, *Manuskripte zu den Metaszienzen*, *op. cit.*, p. 166.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ M. Scheler, *Biologievorlesung*, *op. cit.*, pp. 306-313. At the beginning of the 1920s, the comparison with the interpretation of the concept of worldview offered by Weber and his school urges Scheler to reformulate the internal articulation of the concept he provides thus far. During the 1910s Scheler detects a natural and a scientific

openly more systematic character of the late Schelerian attempt may be understood as a consequence of a close comparison that the author establishes at the beginning of the '20s with the positivistic philosophy of history of knowledge.¹ Let me explain this point with further detail.

In the above quoted passage Scheler is interested in evidencing correspondences among the ontogenetic, phylogenetic and cultural layers of human development. The way the author formulates these correspondences implies a criticism directed to Comte's famous law of the three stages.² Already in the 1921 article *Über die positivistische Geschichtsphilosophie des Wissens (Dreistadiengesetz)* Scheler had denounced a "Eurocentric" bias in Comte's law: the psychosociological dynamics that runs from a religious and a metaphysical towards a positive account of nature, which is distinctive of the Western society, is so to say "absolutised", assumed as the only possible dynamics. Accordingly, other dynamics that characterise non-Western societies, for

worldview: he explains the latter as a subordinated expression of the former — i.e., as maintaining its basic set of categories. See: M. Scheler, *Lehre von den drei Tatsachen*, in: *Gesammelte Werke*, volume X, edited by M. Scheu Scheler, Francke, Bern-München 1957, pp. 431-474; Engl. transl. *The Theory of the Three Facts*, in: M. Scheler, *Selected Philosophical Essays*, edited by D.R. Lachterman, Northwestern University Press, Evanston (IL) 1973, pp. 202-287. After 1921, Scheler distinguishes between an "absolute" or historically and socio-culturally independent natural worldview and a "relative" or historically and socio-culturally dependent natural worldview. He also detects a third non-naïve kind of worldview. Modern science and philosophy belong to this third kind of worldview. See: M. Scheler, *Weltanschauungslehre, Soziologie und Weltanschauungssetzung*, in: M. Scheler, *Gesammelte Werke*, volume VI, *op. cit.*, pp. 13-27.

¹ See: M. Scheler, *Über die positivistische Geschichtsphilosophie des Wissens (Dreistadiengesetz)*, in: M. Scheler, *Gesammelte Werke*, volume VI, *op. cit.*, pp. 28-49. The article was originally published with another title (*Die positivistische Geschichtsphilosophie und die Aufgabe einer Soziologie der Erkenntnis*) in the review *Kölner Vierteljahreshefte für Sozialwissenschaften*.

² Comte's law of the three stages was presented in the *Course on Positive Philosophy* that was held during the years 1830-1842. The law states that humanity passes through three successive stages of psychosociological development, i.e., the theological, the metaphysical, and the positive stage. In the theological stage humanity explains the apparent anomalies that "break", so to say, the regular course of (different kinds of) events as interventions of supernatural agents. In the second stage supernatural agents as world actors are replaced by abstract metaphysical entities. Finally, in the positive stage, humanity discovers the laws that rule the actual course of events. See: M. Bourdeau, *Les trois états: science, théologie et métaphysique chez Comte*, Editions du Cerf, Paris 2006.

example the Indian and the Chinese society, are overridden by the positivistic philosophy of history of knowledge. For Scheler, the letter incorrectly ascribes a legal or normative value to the Western psychosociological dynamics.¹ In point 3 of the quotation, the reference to a particular sociocultural context, namely to the Western culture, is furnished with the prospect of going beyond the interpretative limit of the positivistic law of the three stages. More precisely, Scheler's intention here is to reset the dynamical or developmental account according to an unprejudiced theoretical perspective. This is possible by placing Western societies in the broader context of the world history. In such a renewed perspective, four stages are detected that are common to the ontogenetic, phylogenetic and cultural layers of the spiritual development of the Western man: the mythic, the vitalistic, the mechanistic and the critical stage. They are briefly described by referring to the concepts of myth, organism, dead thing and spirit, respectively.²

After having clarified the theoretical background, Scheler starts facing the essential typology of the contemporary philosophical theories of life. His first step is to deduce these theories as a class of logical possibilities from the ontological category of life. This category is assumed according to the vague determination provided by natural sciences.³ The procedure I just briefly presented is not in line with the eidetic description Scheler referred to in the introductory remarks. Indeed, being a kind of deduction, it does not harmonise, at least not at a first glance, with the descriptive nature of the analysis Scheler proposed. The author is quite unclear on this point, limiting himself to simply juxtapose logical deduction and eidetic description. In contrast to the former, whose classificatory aim regards (logically) possible theories, the latter is

¹ M. Scheler, *Über die positivistische Geschichtsphilosophie*, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

² According to Scheler, "Man starts always by connecting natural phenomena to a changing expression, a kind of language of more or less individualised spiritual and demoniacal centres of force [...] In a second broad phase of the history of culture his image of the world is panvitalistic and organological. In place of spirits and demons (myths) [...] appear categories that originate from the image of the organism [...] It follows, as a third phase, the discovery of the dead world and of its fundamental laws, first the laws of mechanics, which are introduced only in the Western culture during Galilei's age [...] Finally, it follows a fourth total state of the human spirit [...] both the dogmatism of panvitalism and of panmechanism are abandoned. Thus, the critical question emerges: which categories must be used in relation to living beings, which in relation to dead things?" (M. Scheler, *Manuskripte zu den Metaszienzen*, *op. cit.*, p. 167).

³ *Ibid.*, p. 168.

introduced to gather real (*wirklich*) theories on life phenomena.¹ Accordingly, it seems that the essential types of biological theories should not be logically deduced: they must be eidetically described, though on the backdrop of a close, pre-given class of logical possibilities. The obscurity associated with this methodological suggestion is not easy to solve. Nonetheless, I will try to shed some light thereon by closely reviewing the classification proposed by the author. As anticipated, the 1908-1909 lecture has no analogous path in the meta-theoretical understanding of life. In such a case, therefore, it will not be useful as a basis for comparison.

Scheler collects four possible theoretical perspectives on life phenomena.² Namely:

- I. The panvitalistic perspective, according to which life is the fundamental category all other categories must be traced back to.
- II. The monistic chemical-physical perspective that explains life through categories and principles of inorganic nature.
- III. The dualistic vitalistic perspective that, in its modern version, detects different causal factors, forces and laws at the basis of the organic and inorganic nature.
- IV. The noetic perspective, which, in establishing a primary cause for the being of the world, approaches life phenomena as direct or indirect effects of this cause.

The perspective I-IV correspond to four classes of logical possibilities in the theorisation of life. The procedure adopted by the author in passing from these four classes of possible logical theories to those that, as it will be shown, are the eighteen/nineteen classes of real theories is relatively explicit, already in relation to the perspective I, namely the panvitalistic perspective. Here, the logical class is interpreted by Scheler as an ideal limit that may be only approximated by the corresponding essential type, which is grasped through the eidetic description. For example, as an essential type, panvitalism collects theories richer in contents but less specific in the conceptual characterization than the ones that belong to the logical class. In this direction, the category of life may appear as connected to the category of agency, such as in Bergson's theory of the vital impetus (*élan vital*). However, Bergson speculates on a super-individual unitary living agency that is closely linked with another category,

¹ As is put by Scheler, "we initially prove logically possible theories, prior to looking at the real ones" (*ibid.*).

² *Ibid.*, pp. 168-177.

namely the category of consciousness, which is interpreted here as the intuitive perception of experience and as the flow of inner time.¹ The other possibility detected by the author refers to theories that hold spirit as a category distinct from and irreducible to the category of life. In this way, the panvitalistic interpretation of life as the fundamental ontological category is jeopardised.

In contrast to panvitalism, whose essential type involves only two kinds of real philosophical theories of life, the (essential type of) chemical-physical monism is highly articulated.² Scheler distinguishes eight kinds of theories, among which one also finds theories that are no longer contemporary.³ They are as follows:

- i. The metaphysical materialism that traces life and the other ontological categories back to the moving matter, which is assumed as the fundamental ontological category. Scheler gives as examples the ancient materialism of Empedocles, Democritus and Leucippus and the modern materialism of Hobbes and de La Mettrie.
- ii. The mechanistic theory, according to which there is only one fundamental form of legality in nature that overlaps with the laws of mechanics. As noticed by the author, this theory may entail or not a dualistic view regarding the soul-body problem. In the first case, it implies a substantialist interpretation of the terms, such as in the theories of Descartes, Lotze and their schools. In the second case, a functionalist interpretation is usually promoted. An example is offered by the associationism in psychology.
- iii. The chemical version of the mechanistic theory that focuses on the explication of life phenomena through laws of inorganic chemistry. Proponents of this version of the theory are scientists like Verworn, Tschermack and Fischer.
- iv. The physical version of the mechanistic theory that concentrate on explaining life phenomena by means of actually mechanical laws. Here, Scheler recalls the position maintained by Bernstein, a renowned German physiologist.
- v. The energetic theory promoted, among others, by Ostwald. This theory equals all the levels of aggregation of matter, such as the level of the

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 168.

² *Ibid.*, pp.171-173.

³ Making reference to the theory of metaphysical materialism, Scheler states that “it is today dead” (*ibid.*, p. 171). The same consideration is made thereafter in relation to the theory of the so-called energetic monism.

living body, with energy complexes. The equivalence is obtained by interpreting the material property of the mass as the capacity of producing energy and by introducing a specific kind of morphological energy (*Gestaltenergie*), which accounts for the organisation of the material aggregates.

- vi. The positivistic theory that, for Scheler, collects a number of different contributions, such as those provided by classical positivists, e.g., Comte, and empiriocritics, like Mach and Avenarius. The reductionism pursued by this kind of chemical-physical monism consists in interpreting life phenomena as composed of fundamental observable properties and theoretical constructions extrinsic to the phenomena themselves, on which the description/prediction of the observables depends. Accordingly, the difference between chemical-physical phenomena and life phenomena concerns only the logical level, understood as a theoretical-constructive level.
- vii. The morphological physicalism of Köhler, which states the real existence of physical morphologies that may be explained or predicted by laws of structural organisation.
- viii. The machinalism (*Machinismus*) that considers living beings as aggregates of material and energetic factors. These factors are traced back to the inner intelligence of nature. Scheler mentions again Lotze, together with Schultz, the author of the influential book entitled *Die Maschinentheorie des Lebens*.

As to the third theoretical perspective, namely the perspective of dualistic vitalism, the internal articulation of the corresponding essential type is presented by the author through three couples of opposite real theories.¹ The first couple involves the opposite theories of objective and psychic vitalism. Objective vitalism aims at providing a scientific explanation of life phenomena. This explanation is however obtained only in negative terms, i.e., as the evidence of the absence of a conceivable set of mechanical laws to be applied for explaining or predicting life phenomena. In this case, no example of real theory is provided by the author. In contrast to the objective version, psychic vitalism rejects scientific (i.e., mechanical) explanations. It focuses on psychic factors as conditioning factors that influence — as their necessary but not sufficient conditions — the chemical-physical processes in the organism. Lamarck is mentioned as the main representative of this line of thought. The second couple of opposite theories embraces the formal and the functional version of vitalism.

¹ M. Scheler, *Manuskripte zu den Metaszienzen*, *op. cit.*, pp. 174-175.

They concentrate on understanding the formation of biological structures and morphologies at the level of the organism, i.e., at the ontogenetic level, by relying on the concepts of form and function, respectively. The leading proponent of formal vitalism is recognised in Driesch, who restored the Aristotelian figure of first entelechy as an internal organising principle that exists in all living beings.¹ The third couple is introduced in connection with the characterisation of the living being as an agent: according to Scheler, there is a version of vitalism that stresses the idea of a superindividual agency operated by individual living beings and another version that rests on the opposite view, namely on the overlap between the agency and individual living being. The first version is defended by theorists, such as Becher, Bergson and Lodge, whereas Wundt — together with Driesch — is named as an exponent of the second version.

The fourth theoretical perspective is presented after two very brief considerations that regard the identification of soul and spirit pursued by contemporary vitalists and the historical evolution of the German vitalism from Stahl to Becher.² Scheler interprets the essential type as consisting of two groups of traditional metaphysical theories that recognise the spiritual nature of the absolute being, on which all living phenomena depend. The first group is the group of the theistic theories, according to which life is the expression of the soul created by God. The second group is the group of the machinal theories that conceive living beings as inanimate machines created by God. A huge number of representatives are quoted that go from Scholastic philosophers for the group of theistic theories to modern philosophers, like Descartes and

¹ As clarified by Driesch himself, “entelechy means the faculty of achieving a ‘*forma essentialis*’; being and becoming are united here in a most remarkable manner: time enters into the Timeless, i.e., into the ‘idea’ in the sense of Plato. Even elementary physiology teaches its student that the organic form is ‘*forma essentialis*’ in yet another sense of the word. The form of the organism is not only built up typically, but is also kept in its normal state, despite a permanent change in material, by metabolism in the widest sense” (H. Driesch, *The Science and Philosophy of the Organism. The Gifford Lectures Delivered before the University of Aberdeen in the year 1908*, volume II, Black, London 1908, p.149). It is important to note that, according to Driesch, there are different kinds of entelechy, the two main ones being the entelechy of morphogenesis and the psychoid or the “entelechy of real acting by external inorganic events” (*ibid.*, p. 231). The different kinds of entelechy are strictly interrelated by a hierarchical structure, which is thought of as a genetic structure that originates from the coordinating entelechy of the gametes — in particular of the egg cell — during fertilisation.

² M. Scheler, *Manuskripte zu den Metaszienzen*, *op. cit.*, p. 175.

Malebranche, in connection with the group of machinal theories. At this point, it seems that the author intends to introduce by contrast a third group of theories, although this is not included in the final account — which is indeed evaluated as composed of eighteen theories.¹ To this hypothetical group belong theories that, as the ones proposed by Schopenhauer and von Hartmann, do not ascribe (only) the attribute of the spirit to the absolute being, promoting, instead, as an alternative, an irrational-voluntaristic characterisation (e.g. Schopenhauer) or a dual energetic-ideal characterisation (e.g. von Hartmann).²

2.2 Criticism vs dogmatism: the “general methodological principle” and the “foundational order” of the philosophical questions regarding life phenomena

To conclude the analysis of the first notebook of *Biologie-Vorlesung*, let me pay more attention to objectives 2 and 3, namely the last two goals presented in the general plan of the lecture — more specifically, as has been already seen, these goals belong to the plan of the first part of the lecture. Both the objectives are not suitably addressed. Here, Scheler limits himself to simply make some suggestions that go mainly in the direction of revealing the tight connection that exists between the criticism of the essential types of philosophical theories regarding life phenomena (objective 2) and the methodological issue associated with the philosophy of life (objective 3). A brief consideration is dedicated also to the foundational order of the philosophical questions that result from the critical analysis of the real theories we have briefly reviewed in the previous paragraph. This order includes three main questions, which concern, first, the explication of nature, and then the dualisms between the living and the dead and between the spirit and nature. The first question branches in a series of subordinated questions, as I will show in a while. For the moment, let me focus on the connection between criticism and methodology.

Scheler is quite clear in this regard: the eighteen philosophical theories subjected to eidetic description and classification are dogmatic (*dogmatisch*) in nature because “they do not pose and solve the gnoseological problems regarding the knowledge of life according to an autonomous method”.³ In such a case, namely in terms of dogmatic characterisation, the metatheoretical analysis is not effectively conducted by the author. He stresses the point that concerns the way in which the position and the solution of “the gnoseological

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 177.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 176-177.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 177.

problems regarding the knowledge of life” are to be faced with. In this direction, Scheler presents a general methodological principle (*allgemeiner methodischer Grundsatz*), concentrating on the difference between his own approach to the critical theme and that pursued by Kant and the exponents of the Neo-Kantian schools.

In my opinion, it is not possible to transform the problem “how should the living and the dead be grasped and inquired” in a purely gnoseological and methodological problem, as is done by Kant and his Neo-Kantian followers. However: it is equally impossible to set gnoseology aside. It is a general methodological principle of the philosophy that I profess that the real ontological problems and the gnoseological problems have *their common basis in the essential phenomenology of the objects*.¹

As anticipated, the connection between real ontology and gnoseology as well as the mediating role played by the essential phenomenology of the object are already present in the second section of *Biologievorlesung (1908/09)*. However, in this text the real ontological and the gnoseological component are quite generically interpreted. The former appears with reference to the natural worldview, which is pursued by common sense and science.² The letter overlaps with the epistemology of classical mechanics.³ The phenomenological component also is differently articulated in the 1908-1909 lecture with respect to the first notebook of *Biologie-Vorlesung*. It focuses, indeed, on first-level objects, namely on mechanical and biological objects,⁴ whereas in the first part of the 1926-1927 lecture the attention is on types or classes of theories — i.e., on higher-level objects. There are three relevant points here: the explicit formulation of the general methodological principle, which guarantees a critical character to the Schelerian project. Second, the principle is provided in an argumentative context where the eidetic description is applied to the essential types of real philosophical theories of life phenomena. So, as a third point, this application implies that the objectual domain of the real ontology is extended to include philosophical theories themselves. These letters are conceived by the author as cultural objects that reflect non-naïve though still dogmatic worldviews distinctive of the Western Modern culture — more precisely, of the second and the third stage of cultural development of the Western man. Transforming already enunciated theories in higher-level real objects is a trend

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 177-178; emphasis in original.

² M. Scheler, *Biologievorlesung (1908/09)*, *op. cit.*, p. 306.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 302-313.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 285-300.

distinctive of Scheler's late essential phenomenology of the object, where philosophy is seen as capable of establishing or setting a non-naïve and autonomous worldview.¹ Along this line, both the subjective and the objective side of philosophical theories are seen as graspable through a complex system of methodical means. This system merges eidetic descriptions of ideal and real objects of a higher level, as well as essential types of conscious acts, and positive scientific explanations of the ethnological, sociological and psychological aspects of the philosophical theoretical construction.²

As to the foundational order of philosophical questions, the series of subordinated issues that concern the explication of nature — interpreted as the first or founding question with respect to the ones referring to the topic of dualism — are listed by the author in the following terms:³

1. General logic and ontology.
2. Highest principles of nature.
3. Highest forms of spacetime multiplicities.

Scheler stresses the point that, at this level of abstractness, the explication of nature should consider neither the categorial difference between the living and the dead, nor the structural difference between the ontological being of nature and the human knowledge thereof. The categorial difference between the living and the dead is introduced as the issue of phenomenal dualism

¹ In the 1922 article *Weltanschauungslehre, Soziologie und Weltanschauungssetzung* Scheler criticises Weber's interpretation of philosophy as a formal discipline, highlighting its Neo-Kantian background. The focus of the criticism is on the equivalence between material or regional ontologies and comparative theories of worldviews. Scheler defends the position that philosophy may stake out a non-relativistic, objectively grounded material dimension, based on an object-oriented essential phenomenology. Being a material discipline too, philosophy has a worldview: the philosophical worldview is non-naïve, as it is the one set by Modern science, being however autonomous regarding its own foundations — this is not the case of the scientific worldview. For Scheler, this critical character is due to a complex system of methodical means based on the interplay between eidetic descriptions applied to first- and higher-level ideal objects and positive methods. This system guarantees an autonomous, a reflexive or, more simply, a metatheoretical direction to the philosophical investigation. For the concept of philosophical worldview see also: M. Scheler, *Philosophische Weltanschauung*, in M. Scheler, *Gesammelte Werke*, volume IX, edited by M.S. Frings, Francke, Bern-München 1975, pp. 75-85.

² M. Scheler, *Weltanschauungslehre*, *op. cit.*, pp. 19-20.

³ M. Scheler, *Manuskripte zu den Metaszienzen*, *op. cit.*, p. 179.

(*phänomenaler Dualismus*), which is seen as grounded on the founding question of the explication of nature. According to the author, this kind of dualism may be stated by eidetic descriptions, as well as by speculative inferences that are distinctive of the metaphysics of the relative being (*ens ab alio*), namely the metaphysics of the limit problems of the positive sciences, which is meant as a basic component of the theory of metasciences, as I will show in the concluding remarks of this article.¹ With regard to the metaphysics of the absolute being (*ens a se*), dualism concerns the categories of spirit and nature. In the late Schelerian production, spirit and nature are both principles of the relative being as well as attributes of the absolute being. The dualism of spirit and nature is connoted by Scheler as *oberster Dualismus*, i.e., the highest kind of dualism.²

At this point, Scheler mentions two metaphysical theories that are exclusive to his production of the 1920s: the theory of the levels of existential relativity (*Stufen der Daseinsrelativität*) and the theory of the impulse (*Drang*). I will discuss the latter theory in the following paragraph because it plays a central role in the second notebook of *Biologie-Vorlesung*, where Scheler argues for a functional version of dualistic vitalism in a critical comparison with the position maintained by Driesch — who is seen as the leading representative of the opposite formal version of dualistic vitalism, according to what has been previously said. The impulse is interpreted here as the dynamical principle of being, as the “nature in God”, namely as one of the two fundamental attributes of the absolute being together with the spiritual one. The metaphysical theory of impulse is a novelty with respect to the first Munich lecture on biology. With the theory of the levels of existential relativity Scheler recognises the correlation between act and object as a metaphysical principle. This principle enables one to infer something about the *dasein*, the existence or being there of the act and the object, both meant as real terms — i.e., as relational terms affected by the determination of being real. Accordingly, here, the act-object correlation is not understood as the core structure of phenomenological experience, namely as the intentionality of consciousness that correlate the essence or being so (*sosein*) of an act-term and an object-term. The theory of the levels of existential relativity has never been systematically discussed by the author.

In this case, the comparison with the text of the 1908-1909 lecture is quite useful. It allows to highlight an aspect of Scheler’s early interpretation of real ontology, as part of the theory of natural worldview, which is receptive

¹ See below, § 4.

² M. Scheler, *Manuskripte zu den Metaszienzen*, *op. cit.*, p. 179.

to constructive arguments regarding the constitution, identification or synthesis of the object. These arguments do not clearly imply a thematisation of the existence of the object: existence is a metaphysical subject matter alien to a phenomenological theory of worldview, as the one attempted by the author. However, understood in ontological terms, namely as a synthetic principle, construction goes far beyond intentionality in the direction of establishing a very tight correlation between the identification of the objectual being, on the one side, and the constitution operated by the act, on the other. This point may be clarified by following the Schelerian analysis itself. In Section II of *Biologievorlesung (1908/09)* Scheler describes a process of construction as distinctive of the natural worldview: the object emerges from a value-oriented act of choice that opts for at least one formal unity of meaning, together with its material fulfilment provided by the perceptual content. The latter is selected by (the interplay of) the sensory functions among possible contents that are available in the perceptual situation.¹ To my purpose, the important point here is that, as a synthetic principle, construction does not find the formal and the material components of the object as already given. It provides an explication of their genesis or origin. Such a genetic perspective is an interesting aspect of Scheler's early phenomenological production, which I have developed elsewhere.² In the present argumentative context, the genetic perspective on the identification of the object enables a preliminary formulation of the concept of ontological relativity, which is however largely alternative to the later metaphysical formulation focused on the existence of the correlative terms. More in general, a trend may be noted in the Schelerian reflection on the topic, which consists in a more structured theorisation of the concept of relativity. Indeed, during the 1920s, this concept acquires an articulation with respect to both a distinction of levels of correlation and an internal characterisation of the act of choice. These developments are due to the tight connection established by the author between the metaphysical theory of impulse, on the one hand, and the metaphysical theory of phantasy and love, on the other hand.³ According to its metaphysical formulation, phantasy is a universal impulsive force that continuously expresses its constructive power regarding space and matter at different levels of complexity — levels on which the layered structure of the existential relativity grounds. In contrast to phantasy, love is a universal tension towards higher-level values, which is however impulsive, too. Love is interpreted here

¹ M. Scheler, *Biologievorlesung, op. cit.*, pp. 292-293.

² 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.

³ See below, § 3.2.

as a conatus that strives towards a selective realisation of the values subjected to the act of choice.¹

3. Biological categories: a text-based comparison between the second notebook of *Biologie-Vorlesung* and Section I and Section III of *Biologievorlesung* (1908/09)

In the general overview the second part of the lecture is dedicated to an essential phenomenology of life and of the three main vital forms, i.e., plant, animal and man. This objective is seen as justified by a proof of the necessity to reach the distinction between the categories of the living and the dead through conceptual determinations that are not carried out on an empirical basis. In this context, Scheler names Roux, Tschermak and Ostwald, three scientists that revealed the difficulty of discriminating between organic and inorganic processes starting from physiological, biochemical and morphological data, respectively.² To carefully evaluate the text that came to us, it is important to understand the way in which the line of argument must be conducted according to the author. Henckmann, for example, who edited this notebook of the Cologne lecture, highlighted a discrepancy between the planned objectives exposed in the first notebook and the actual reasoning carried out in the second notebook. The latter appears as a more or less coherent and consistent series of considerations that regard distinctive topics of Scheler's philosophy and metaphysics of life.³ In my view, this interpretation is too strict and, at the same time, less attentive to the Schelerian attempt. Indeed, overlapping aspects exist between the grounds planned by the author and the ones performed. The close critical comparison that Scheler establishes with Driesch's work realises, at least in its main logical passages, the proof concerning the categories of the living and the dead to which the author refers to in the introduction to the lecture. Driesch's position best exemplifies the fallacy of theories that derive the aforementioned categorial distinction from an empirically grounded analytical procedure. As we will see in more detail in the next paragraph, the attention here concentrates on the category of entelechy, with reference to which Scheler deeply misunderstands the multifaceted analysis carried out by Driesch from

¹ M. Scheler, *Manuskripte zur Lehre vom Grunde aller Dinge*, op. cit., p. 187-189.

² M. Scheler, *Manuskripte zu den Metaszienzen*, op. cit., p. 165.

³ W. Henckmann, *Schelers 'Biologie-Vorlesung'*, op. cit., p. 256.

a perspective, which is self-connoted as critical idealism.¹ For Scheler, instead, Driesch's categorial analysis is unable to distinguish between the essence of life, as an ideal unity, and its real bearers. This is due to the fact that his analysis moves from empirical laws, i.e., regularities derived from the matter of facts.²

Despite some degrees of uniformity in the argumentation — a uniformity that contradicts comments such as Henckmann's one —, the text under consideration does not provide for an articulated phenomenological investigation of life phenomena and vital forms. Considering this fact, it seems to me that a comparative analysis with Section I and Section III of *Biologievorlesung (1908/09)* is useful to capture Scheler's main points. In these sections relatively extensive descriptions were operated in the direction of highlighting the essence of forms (Section I) and of organic events like movement and the transformation of state (Section III). In order to conduct such a comparative analysis, however, it is crucial to assume a result obtained in the previous paragraphs, namely the different role that is attributed to the essential phenomenology of the object in the early and the late phase of Scheler's phenomenological production. Up to the 1920s the author deems phenomenology, i.e., the eidetic description, as a suitable tool for implementing his critical project of ontology of Modern science. This view is no longer true following 1922,³ when Scheler connects the phenomenology-inspired critical research and the philosophy of being within a systematic project of metaphysics.

¹ “On the basis of our critically idealistic philosophy, we may look a little more optimistically upon ‘explaining’. According to this doctrine, the generalities which are considered to ‘explain’ are formulated according to the immanent and categorial principles of reasoning a priori, and what empiricism adds to them only consists in the coordination of some truly inductive general terms with the categorial generalities” (H. Driesch, *The Science and Philosophy of the Organism*, *op. cit.*, 206).

² As quoted by Scheler: “It is impossible for him [Driesch — *N.d.R.*] to distinguish the accidental terrestrial organisms from the essence of life in general” (W. Henckmann, *Scheler's 'Biologie-Vorlesung'*, *op. cit.*, p. 258).

³ In 1922 Scheler openly detaches himself from the cultural horizon of the catholic church, which was hitherto embraced. In so doing, he puts into question the basic assumptions of catholic theism, such as the original personality of God and his creative power regarding the being and value of the world. At the same time, he starts developing his own metaphysical position. Scheler's work is usually divided into three main periods, namely an early period (1899-1906), a central phenomenological period (1908/1909-1921) and a late period (1922-1928). See: E. Avé-Lallemant, *Bio-Bibliographischer Anhang*, in P. Good (Ed.), *Max Scheler im Gegenwartsgeschehen der Philosophie*, Francke, Bern-München 1975, pp. 267-284.

3.1 The category of vital form

The second notebook of *Biologie-Vorlesung* starts with a strong criticism directed towards Driesch's category of entelechy. Scheler observes that this category is not able to provide a well-founded representation of the relationship between vital form and matter. More specifically, it does not clearly address the question of the origin of life, as well as the complex of issues associated with conditions where the vital functions are reduced or lost.¹ The question of the origin (*Ursprung*) of life was already introduced in the final part of Section I of *Biologievorlesung (1908/09)*, where it was presented as a metaphysical question in contrast to the scientific question of development (*Entstehung*) of life distinctive of evolution theory. Here, Scheler suggested a phenomenological clarification of the two questions: on this basis, he denied the possibility of the development of life. More precisely, he rejected the idea of a being that is in common to the living and the non-living entity, establishing a close critical comparison with the system of scientific metaphysics elaborated by the neo-Darwinian Ernst Haeckel.² In contrast to the question of the origin of life, the complex of issues that emerge from the limit conditions of vital functions seems to be missing in the Munich lecture. In *Biologie-Vorlesung*, instead, Scheler recalls the conditions of death, illness, poisoning and the limits of organic regeneration within a conceptual framework of whole-parts relationship. This framework is presumably assumed to capture, from an ontological perspective, the interplay between vital form (the whole) and matter (the parts) in the organism. The aforementioned limitations detected in the interpretation of entelechy provided by Driesch are seen as due to the adoption of a justification of the category that consists in "mere negative" operations: the proof of the impossibility to think about a mechanism that explains life phenomena. Furthermore, according to Scheler, Driesch assumes the classical formulation of mechanics. However, this is not the only possible explanation based on motion, as demonstrated by recent developments in quantum field theory.³ As anticipated, however, the main point of Scheler's criticism is the absence of a clear distinction between the essence of life, on the one side, and the organisms, on the other side. The latter are nothing more than species-specific configurations of life forms hosted by planet Earth.

Scheler is largely wrong in evaluating Driesch's entelechy. First, by using it as an example of an empirically derived category, Scheler proves to

¹ W. Henckmann, *Schelers 'Biologie-Vorlesung'*, *op. cit.*, pp. 256-257.

² M. Scheler, *Biologievorlesung*, *op. cit.*, pp. 266-270.

³ W. Henckmann, *Schelers 'Biologie-Vorlesung'*, *op. cit.*, pp. 258-259.

ignore how Driesch's natural philosophy takes a radical aprioristic position assimilated by Kant. Driesch openly puts at the centre of his analytical interest the categories of the scientific objects, in particular the object of biology that is seen as a fundamental scientific discipline.¹ Second, it should be noted that Driesch's entelechy, interpreted as a core category of biology, is subjected to a three-step justification procedure.² It consists in 1) the characteristics of entelechy, which is abstractly performed by focusing on the relationship of organic body to other bodies in nature; 2) the negative justification of entelechy with respect to universal and specific principles of natural sciences, i.e., the universal principle of sufficient reason and the specific principles of thermodynamics and of mechanics, and 3) the positive justification of entelechy through a phenomenological description of the first-person experience of one's own body and the body of the alter ego.³ Such a complex justification procedure cannot be reduced to "mere negative" operations, as done by Scheler. Finally, both the critical comment on mechanics and the comments on the origin of life and the limit conditions of vital functions may be easily falsified by referring to Driesch's work.⁴

¹ As stated by Driesch: "Biology, I hear someone says, is simply and solely an empirical science; in some sense it is nothing but applied physics and chemistry, perhaps applied mechanics. There are no fundamental principles in biology which could bring it in any close contact with philosophy [...] It will be my essential endeavour to convince you, in the course of these lectures, that such an aspect of the science of biology is wrong; that biology is an elemental natural science in the true sense of the word. But if biology is an elemental science, then, and only then, it stands in close relations to epistemology and ontology—in the same relations to them, indeed, as every natural science does which deals with true elements of nature, and which is willing to abandon naïve realism and contribute its share to the whole of human knowledge" (H. Driesch, *The Science and Philosophy of the Organism. The Gifford Lectures Delivered before the University of Aberdeen in the year 1907*, volume I, Black, London 1908, pp. 8-9).

² H. Driesch, *The Science and Philosophy of the Organism*, volume II, *op. cit.*, pp. 137-152, 153-338.

³ In my view, the positive justification of entelechy is a very interesting point in Driesch's philosophy of the organism. It might be interestingly compared with the investigations of the (empathised) lived body pursued by classical phenomenologists, such as Husserl, Merleau-Ponty and Scheler himself.

⁴ Driesch is aware of the relatively limited state of progress of contemporary mechanical physics. Accordingly, in his negative justification of entelechy, he deals with a "universal mechanics" based on analytical tools, namely on the toolkit of mathematical analysis. As is known, the main part of classical mechanics and of quantum mechanics is applied analysis, which is formulated as differential equations. The topics of the origin of life and the limit conditions of vital functions are treated by Driesch in

Despite the inadequate interpretation, the comparison with the category of entelechy is used by Scheler to introduce his own characterisation of the vital form as a biological category. Furthermore, it plays a crucial role in the categorial distinction between the living and the dead, which, for Scheler, is attainable only at the level of the relative being. According to the author, the vital form is not a structural or organising principle, but a functional one. It is a “temporal form”, a rhythm during life functions. As quoted by the author: “Life is first of all and formally a process of a specific rhythm (Ehrenberg); in each moment of their being there, the relatively static forms of the organs are fixed and preserved through this process. See Ehrenberg. Elementary processual unities on a material and with energies, which also belong to the dead world, are the last datum of an autonomous biology (Biorheuse, see Ehrenberg)”.¹ Here, Scheler refers to the work of the German biologist and physiologist Rudolph Ehrenberg, who published his masterpiece *Theoretische Biologie vom Standpunkt der Irreversibilität des elementaren Lebensvorganges* in 1923, where the temporal form and its components named “Biorheuse” are systematically addressed as fundamental biological categories.

In Section I of *Biologievorlesung (1908/09)* Scheler repeatedly mentioned the category of vital form and some issues related to it, e.g., the relationship between the characterisation of matter and of vital form, which is seen as a kind of correlation.² Nonetheless, no extensive characterisation of the category was provided. Only in a specific passage of the text Scheler quite clearly expresses his interpretation. It is centred on the orientation or directional laws of the variation that affects the organic structure (*Richtungsgesetze der Variation der Organisation*).³ This is a position very close to Driesch’s one. The crucial point to understand the shift from a structural to a functional view is the reduction of matter to energy quanta, a reduction that excludes organisation as a fundamental principle of life. Scheler presents this point by constructing two parallelisms: one between organic and inorganic matter, the other one between unities of force and unities of function. As quoted by the author, the

terms of an “insoluble” and theoretically less relevant problem than that concerning the laws of life and of the limits of the (possible) regulation exercised by entelechy, respectively. See: H. Driesch, *The Science and Philosophy of the Organism*, volume II, pp. 182-184, pp. 260-263.

¹ W. Henckmann, *Schelers ‘Biologie-Vorlesung’*, *op. cit.*, p. 259.

² According to Scheler, if matter is understood as eternal or, alternatively, as created, the vital form must be interpreted in the same way, namely as an eternal or created form, respectively. See: M. Properzi, *Max Scheler’s Biologievorlesung*, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

³ M. Scheler, *Biologievorlesung*, *op. cit.*, p. 280.

essence “from which matter and the secondary measurable energies, respectively the elementary unities of force fields $f(m, s, t)$, on the one side, and the unities of the life process (*Biorheusem*), on the other side, *become*, might only be the most elementary effect quanta (*Wirkungsquanten*) of the unitary impulse itself”.¹ In another passage Scheler focuses the attention on organic functions and their unities, stressing an important point: the reduction of (vital) matter to energy quanta has to be grasped as a reduction to “the metaphysical last parts of the inorganic (the smallest energy quanta)”.²

3.2. *The category of unity*

The text of the second notebook of *Biologie-Vorlesung* continues with a brief discussion of an epistemological implication of the two-kind parallelism between the living and the dead, which I have just presented. This implication concerns the domain of application of the natural laws that capture physical and/or chemical regularities in the inorganic nature.³ Against the concept of universal validity that excludes the possibility of a “break” in the deterministic chain of natural phenomena — even in the passage from chemical-physical to biological phenomena —, Scheler defends a more articulated position grasped by the concept of co-validity (*Mitgiltigkeit*). According to this position the course of organic processes does not disprove inorganic natural laws. Chemical-physical processes follow their path both inside and outside the organism: they are the same processes, although very effective biocatalysts, such as the enzymes, are used by the organism to put them into action. Consequently, Scheler comments, it is not the process, but the way of its realisation in the organism that deviates from inorganic systems. Once again, in order to strengthen his position corroborating it with scientific evidence, Scheler refers to the work of Ehrenberg, together with the contribution of a less-known German biologist, André. Scheler does not recognise that his concept of co-validity, which accounts for the feasibility of a unified picture of nature from the perspective of an epistemology of contemporary sciences, is very close to the compatibilist interpretation promoted by Driesch. This interpretation is presented in the context of an epistemological justification of the natural character of autonomic factors in life phenomena.⁴

¹ W. Henckmann, *Schelers 'Biologie-Vorlesung', op. cit., p. 259.*

² *Ibid.*, p. 263.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 259.

⁴ H. Driesch, *The Science and Philosophy of the Organism*, volume II, p. 152.

Despite this closeness, however, there is a great distance between the two authors regarding the interpretation of the unity of nature as an ontological category. Driesch approaches the topic according to a strong phenomenism,¹ whereas Scheler connects to the topic the first step towards a metaphysics of the absolute being pursued in relation to the principle/attribute of the impulse. The focus of Scheler's discussion is both on the impulse as a principle of self-differentiation, based on which the metaphysical unity of nature splits into two ontological regions, and on the impulse as an attribute. The latter is composed of two levels, i.e., the level of phantasy as a materialising force and the level of the all-life (*All-Leben*) as love tension towards the vital value of higher level, namely the beauty of the multi-harmony (*Polyharmonie*) of vital forms.² The principle of self-differentiation is in contrast with the metaphysical dualism of substances, which is incorrectly ascribed to Driesch's distinction between mechanisms and entelechy. According to Scheler, Driesch promotes a view where organisms, interpreted as psychic substances, namely as entelechies, are separated and isolated from the rest of nature.³ Driesch is also accused of introducing a metaphysical principle (i.e. entelechy) to give reason to such irrelevant phenomena on a cosmological scale as are the organic instances of life.⁴ With regard to this point, it is interesting to note that, in contrast to the position supported in 1908-1909, Scheler deems organisms as Earth-specific entities. The deny of alien organisms is founded on the lack of scientific evidence as well as on the observation that quantum theory allows a complete understanding of all possible chemical elements: there cannot be unknown molecules at the basis of extra-terrestrial organic events.⁵ In *Biologievorlesung (1908/09)* Scheler used the possibility of alien compounds as an argument to invalidate the hypothesis of the spontaneous generation of life from inorganic matter. The latter was assumed according to the formulation provided by

¹ In Driesch's work the search for unity emerges from the need of overcoming a difficulty in Kant's critical philosophy: placing life in the mechanisms of the Newtonian science, where (phenomenal) existence implies its being "in space" as the fundamental structure of nature. Driesch's solution goes in the direction of detecting an additional structure, i.e., being "with regard to" spatial nature, on the basis of which life is explained as a natural phenomenon. See: H. Driesch, *The Science and Philosophy of the Organism*, volume II, pp. 319-323.

² W. Henckmann, *Scheler's 'Biologie-Vorlesung'*, *op. cit.*, pp. 260-261.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 261.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 262-263.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 262.

Haeckel that speculates the chemical homogeneity of the universe.¹ Phantasy and love as levels of the attribute of impulse in the absolute being are responsible for the way the differentiation of nature is fulfilled, namely as a process that has no metaphysical reality, but only a phenomenal status. Inorganic bodies and organic events are images (*Bilder*). However, they are independent from human consciousness, whereas the vital forms are parts of the all-life. Scheler recapitulates his position of metaphysical monism as to the being of nature in three points: “1) There is an originary phenomenon, idea, essence of ‘life’, for which the existential conditions in the Earth, *the terrestrial organisms are only an instance* [...] 2) *The total world of inorganic bodies* in space and time, their matters, the living forces, energies, movements are not absolutely real, but *ideal*, our human consciousness transcendent ‘images’ and manifestations of the impulse-phantasy [...] 3) There are for us ‘levels’ of nature (the electron — up to the organism), inorganic-organic, but no metaphysical dualism between the two kingdoms, rather the metaphysical monism of the impulse and only two levels of objectification of its effect”.²

Scheler’s late concept of teleocliny (*Teleoklinie*) is grounded on this monistic view of nature. The concept is used to describe the relationship between the organism and its surrounding environment in a way that is alternative to the concept of teleology. The organism-environment coupling is seen as a causal effect devoid of purposefulness. It implies, however, the metaphysical unity of the living and the dead. In the second notebook of *Biologie-Vorlesung* Scheler defends the concept of teleocliny on a scientific basis. He refers to the work of André Die *Einheit der Natur. Eine biologische und naturphilosophische Untersuchung* and to the research of the American biochemist Henderson on the biological significance of the chemical-physical properties of matter.³ The rejection of the teleological position concerns both its theistic and evolutionary interpretation. According to the former, the ecological matching is due to a supernatural order established by God, whereas the latter focuses on natural processes, for example selective adaptation processes. In the Munich lecture Scheler criticised evolution theory as being unable to give reason to the possibility of adaptation itself as well as of its temporal dynamics: such a possibility cannot be explained by causal nexuses, i.e., by tracing the coupling or matching back to the organism-environment interaction.⁴ This criticism is repropounded in the Cologne lecture. Here, the author stresses the

¹ M. Scheler, *Biologievorlesung*, *op. cit.*, p. 271.

² W. Henckmann, *Schelers ‘Biologie-Vorlesung’*, *op. cit.*, p. 263; emphasis in original.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 265.

⁴ M. Scheler, *Biologievorlesung*, *op. cit.*, pp. 273-274.

explanatory difference between evolution theoretic causality and teleocliny, where a metaphysically unified picture of nature is assumed. Scheler quotes the theory of the double matching between organism and environment elaborated by the Baltic German biologist von Uexküll. He started studying this theory following the publication of Uexküll's work *Umwelt und Innenwelt der Tiere* in 1909. The connection with the concept of teleocliny is however a novelty in Scheler's production.¹

The second notebook of *Biologie-Vorlesung* ends with some brief remarks on the new version of psycho-physical parallelism, which is due to Gestalt psychology. Scheler mentions Wertheimer's contribution to the criticism of association psychology and mechanistic physiology of the nervous system as well as Köhler's book on the physical forms (*physische Gestalten*).² His point here is to highlight a specific expression of the unity of nature that concerns sensory qualities and their neurobiological substrate, which are both interpreted as dynamical whole phenomena that are irreducible to local relationships between isolated parts.

4. Conclusions

My attempt in this article was to provide a systematic reading of the two edited notebooks of Scheler's 1926-1927 Cologne lecture on theoretical biology. I focused my attention on a critical project of phenomenology-driven philosophy of life that the author develops (mainly) on a metatheoretical level. To conclude this article, I would like to reconstruct the whole structure of the Schelerian project in some detail. As anticipated, this project reveals an integrative nature, in the sense that it tightly combines phenomenological and metaphysical themes. The combined effort relies on the theory of metasciences, which offers an understanding of the metatheoretical commitment as directed to elucidate both positive scientific theories and the corresponding axiomatic

¹ In the second notebook of *Biologie-Vorlesung* the connection between Uexküll's theory and the concept of teleocliny is highlighted through the adoption of a non-standard verb, i.e., the verb "einpassen", by means of which Scheler expresses the idea of adaptation as a double matching between the organism and its surrounding environment. As is known, the German verb commonly used by evolution theorists is "anpassen". See: W. Henckmann, *Schelers 'Biologie-Vorlesung', op. cit.*, p. 267.

² *Ibid.*, p. 269-270.

systems constructed with the help of the categorial analysis.¹ In other terms, categorial analysis overlaps here with the clarificatory work that the theory of metasciences provides regarding positive scientific theories. The resulting axiomatic systems are elucidated by speculative means. Meanings may be inferred thanks to them that express the being of existence under the lens of the metaphysical unity of nature, i.e., as resulting from the self-differentiation of the absolute being. As regards the biological sciences, the first step of this complex argumentative procedure is accomplished, in a more or less satisfactory way, by the edited fragments of *Biologie-Vorlesung*. The analysis conducted in § 2 and § 3 revealed that Scheler's argumentation contains a progression from an essential typology of historically and socio-culturally situated philosophical theories that systematise contemporary scientific results towards the detection of an order of fundamental questions, which appear to be solved with the toolkit of the categorial analysis. The discussion I reviewed of the vital form is maybe the best example of this kind of reasoning. My intention here is to show how, according to the original plan of the author, the third and the fourth part of the Cologne lecture may be interpreted as providing the second step of the argumentative procedure mentioned above.

Along this line, as has already been said, the outline placed at the beginning of the first notebook of *Biologie-Vorlesung* introduces two parts of the lecture that have no corresponding published materials. Part three is presented as strictly connected with the categorial analysis pursued in part two. Scheler maintains that, starting from a well-defined set of biological categories, the material limit problems of positive life sciences may be detected and systematically exposed. He highlights that this kind of research establishes a deep point of contact between philosophy and science, despite the different methods they use.² Eight problems are mentioned. They are distinguished in two groups, i.e., the epistemological material limit problems and the ontological material limit problems. The epistemological group contains only the first

¹ As quoted by Scheler: "For all positive sciences, the experienced essential nexuses, collected in thematically different axiomatic systems, are the highest 'presupposition' of the research. At the same time, they are the springboard by means of which it is possible to obtain the 'metaphysics of first kind', namely the metasciences [...] The metasciences of the corresponding objectual domain (meta-physics, meta-biology, meta-psychology, meta-noetics, meta-history and sociology, meta-axiologies, etc.) arise as unified with the status of the positive sciences and their real knowledge in the form of inference structures, whose major premises encompass an a priori knowledge, and their minor premises contain positive scientific knowledge" (M. Scheler, *Manuskripte zu den Metaszienzen*, *op. cit.*, p. 125).

² *Ibid.*, p. 165.

problem, i.e., the problem of how to reach knowledge concerning organisms or, in other terms, the problem of an epistemology of life. The ontological group involves the remaining seven problems, which are the following:

- The problem of the origin of life.
- The problem of morphogenesis or the existence of a mechanics of organic development.
- The problem of a systematics of vital forms, articulated also in accordance with a genetic perspective.
- The problem of the unity and multiplicity of life.
- The problem of phylogenesis.
- The problem of reproduction and inheritance.
- The problem of senescence and of death.

The detection and exposure of material limit problems coincide with (the first attempt of) the construction of the axiomatic system of meta-biology. In this system biological categories operate as axioms and material limit concepts as theorems. The inferences running through the axiomatic system of meta-biology are the subject matter of the fourth part of the lecture. Scheler speaks of four highest metaphysical problems. These kinds of problems may be solved by virtue of the speculative approach to material limit problems of biological sciences, which was sketched in the previous part of the lecture. This is a recap of Scheler's list:

- The relationship between life and inorganic nature.
- The relationship between life and psychic nature.
- The relationship between life, spiritual acts and their centre, i.e., the person.
- The metaphysical position of man in the context of the natural and the historical world.

I would like to conclude this article with a brief quotation, where the author clearly expresses his own interpretation of the subsidiary role played by the philosophy of life regarding the philosophy of the absolute being. As Scheler quoted: "The last and highest question of a philosophy of organisms is the question of the contribution it provides to the philosophy of the absolute".¹

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 166.

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