

Article

Max Scheler's Movement of Love and the Object of Religious Experience

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Abstract: In this paper, I explore the implications of Max Scheler's concept of the movement of love, and I show that this movement, for him, constitutes not only the core of human nature but also the metaphysical presupposition upon which the nature of the object of religious experience could be understood. I argue that Scheler's unique way of blending intellectual knowledge of essences and spiritual intuition, i.e., metaphysics and religion, respectively, makes his position extremely interesting for present-day interpretations of religious experiences. The question then is, could religious experiences, such as awe, bliss, reverence, and revelation, be said to be given only in spiritually participating in the movement of love—and could this participation be the defining factor of these experiences?

Keywords: Max Scheler; movement of love; religious experience; religious act; revelation



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1. Introduction

A generally accepted view of what exactly constitutes the nature of a religious experience is difficult to pinpoint given its vagueness and the wide variety of experiences that are classified under it. Phenomenological approaches to the nature of religious experience have mainly focused on the views of Edmund Husserl's strand of phenomenology, with little or no attention paid to the views of the other pioneer of this school of thought, Max Scheler. In this paper, I explore the implications of Max Scheler's concept of the movement of love and I show that this movement, for him, constitutes not only the core of human nature but also the metaphysical presupposition upon which the nature of the object of religious experience could be understood. Scheler's unique way of blending intellectual knowledge of essences and spiritual intuition, i.e., metaphysics and religion, respectively, makes his position extremely interesting for present-day interpretations of religious experience.

I start by first examining the fundamental role of the movement of love in the becoming of consciousness in human beings and their experiences of the world. This will be followed by a study of Scheler's notion of religious experience, which is defined by his concept of the religious act, and by comparison with present-day views of this experience. I will argue that Scheler's view of religious experience is mainly a consequence of his positions on the act of participating in the movement of love and its attributes, and the fact that these attributes endow human beings with capacities that transcend and precede consciousness. Furthermore, I discuss Scheler's fundamental insight that "there is not nothing" that has implications for his view on the concept of nothingness. These reasons I argue make the object to which a religious act is directed or redirected crucial to understanding what may count as a religious experience, as they imply that the spiritual participation in the unique value or personality of this object is the defining factor of this experience. The question then is, could religious experiences such as awe, bliss, reverence, and revelation be said to be given only in spiritually participating in the movement of love; and could participation be the defining factor of these experiences?

2. The Nature of Movement

2.1. Movement of the Heart

The central role of movement [*Bewegung*] in Max Scheler's works should not be ignored. In the English translations of his works, we encounter expressions such as movement of love; movement of mind; movement of acts; movement of hate; movement of expression; movement of spirit; movement of the innermost personal self; movement of intentions; etc. These expressions not only indicate the importance of the concept of movement in Scheler's thought but also raise the question—what did he mean by a moving love, hate, spirit, mind, or innermost self? To answer this question, let us investigate the meaning of the movement of love [*Bewegung der Liebe*], which is perhaps the most important concept in Scheler's thought and could be considered the mother of all movements, as it is expressed in some of his works, such as the essays "Ordo Amoris" (Scheler 1973c), "Ressentiment" (Scheler 1972), and "Humility" (Scheler 1981). For example, in "Ordo Amoris", Scheler provides a hint of what this movement entails when he states that:

"I find myself in an immeasurable vast world of sensible and spiritual objects which set my heart and passions in constant motion. I know that the objects I can recognize through perception and thought, as well as all that I will, choose, do, perform, and accomplish, depend on the play of this movement of my heart". (Scheler 1973c, p. 98)

This passage raises the question—what is meant by the movement of the heart? One interpretation to rule out is the physical (pumping) motion of the heart described for example in the works of Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas. Aristotle refers to the movement of the heart as the involuntary movements the heart makes outside the control of the intellect (703b4–704a1, p. 1095)¹, while Thomas Aquinas takes this physical movement as originating in the emotions and the intellect since, as far as he was concerned, it is the intellect that causes diverse emotions and cognitions that move the heart.²

However, for Scheler, the movement of the heart referenced in the above quotation refers not only to the pumping, physical motion of the heart but also to a more fundamental, dynamic, process that brings about changes in the passions, intentions, actions, and drives, in a living creature. In other words, it refers to a primal movement that constitutes the drive in an entity. We see glimpses of such descriptions very clearly in Scheler's essay "Idealism and Realism", where he discussed how primal movement relates to his concepts of resistance, consciousness, spatiality, and temporality, concepts that he uses to explicate how human beings (and other living creatures) experience the world.³ So, in order to grasp what Scheler's notion of movement of the heart entails, we need to investigate how the central role of this primal movement pertains to his understanding of consciousness in human beings. However, before we proceed, it should be noted that for Scheler consciousness of something generally refers to "all intentionally directed acts filled with meaning". Scheler thus contrasts his view of consciousness with what he describes as the intellectual view of consciousness, which he claims is based on theories of "representation" and refers to "everything that comes to appearance in inner perception".⁴

2.2. Movement and Consciousness

We begin by exploring the nature of Scheler's concept of movement and how consciousness results from it. In "Idealism and Realism", Scheler introduced the concept of a "tendency" [*Tendenz*] that motivates primal movement in living objects. According to Scheler,

"We define a living movement as one in which, throughout the experience of movement, the change of place of an identical something, which is ingredient in every movement, proves to be founded on "tendency" [*Tendenz*] which is likewise ingredient in all movement". (Scheler 1973b, p. 330)

The important point to note in this quotation is the fact that this "tendency" is an "ingredient in all movement". This point indicates that what Scheler takes to be "tendency"

is not some sort of unmoved mover from which other movements originate, as in Aristotle, but rather that tendency is an essential part of the movement in question.⁵ Although the exact nature of tendency is not always very clear, this characteristic of being part of all movement suggests that Scheler is here referring to what he describes in his *Posthumous works* as a “self-positing eternal Substance” (the *Ens a se*)⁶. This is a Substance of which we only know two of its attributes that together constitute the world (reality) and our consciousness of it. Scheler describes these attributes in various contexts as, respectively, Spirit and Nature, Supreme Mind and Supreme Life, *Geist* and *Drang*, *Agape* and *Eros*, etc., and sometimes he even describes this substance as Supreme Being, eternal Being, or simply as Being.⁷ However, it is important to note that for Scheler’s latter metaphysics, this substance does not refer to God. The eternal Substance is beyond God (Nicholas 2011, p. 148; Frings 1980). For the latter Scheler, God only *becomes* from the interdependency of the two known attributes of the eternal Substance and is therefore dependent on these for their realization. Consequently, Scheler suggests that the eternal attribute of spirit is what God and human beings have in common, implying that human beings and God are collaborators in the realization of the *Ground-of Being*.⁸ Scheler’s position thus differs from any form of monism, such as in Spinoza for whom God is Nature or belongs to Nature, and from Bergson for whom God is, or is the source of, an immanent *élan vital* or love (Nadler 2022). The attributes of the eternal substance will be addressed again below but let us first tackle the issue of the becoming of consciousness which Scheler characterizes as a kind of knowledge.

The Becoming of Consciousness

For Scheler, living things have a tendency for spontaneous self-movement (and self-modification) and it is through this tendency that one becomes conscious of oneself in space and time.⁹ In this spontaneous self-movement one suffers *resistance* from an entity that transcends oneself, resulting in a *reflexive act* that originates consciousness. This process implies that movement precedes consciousness, implying that consciousness cannot be inborn or primordially given in human beings but is rather a kind of knowledge that one discovers in distinct stages of one’s development as a being. Zachary Davis distinguishes three different modes of consciousness in Scheler’s primordial self-movement. These are vital consciousness, bodily consciousness, and self-consciousness. Vital consciousness is the compulsion of self-movement brought about by the drive impulsion (*Drang*). Bodily consciousness is the awareness of having an ego, i.e., the “I can”, the *lived body*, the consciousness of being an individual as distinct from others. Self-consciousness is described as “an achievement reserved for persons alone, for it assumes the act of objectification and ideation”. Each of these three modes of consciousness is separated by *resistance*, which is pain, the suffering of not being able to fulfill a need (Davis 2015, p. 597).¹⁰

The becoming of consciousness forms an important distinction between Scheler and the generally held conception of consciousness as primordially given in human beings as we see in major philosophical works, such as in Descartes, Kant, the German Idealism of Fichte, Schelling and Hegel, neo-Kantianism, and in Husserl (Frings 1992, p. 106) and rules out any form of ontological constructivism. According to Scheler,

“We must reject entirely the frequently encountered assertion that consciousness is a “primal fact”, which one ought not to speak of an “origin” of consciousness. The very same laws and motives in accordance with which we think of consciousness’ raising itself from one level of reflection to the next will apply when we think of consciousness itself origination out of a preconscious, partly subconscious, partly supra-conscious condition of the being of the contents of knowledge. (And the motive is always suffering from some sort, suffering, as we shall see, at the hands of the real being [*Realsein*] which is ecstatically given priori to all consciousness.) Only a very definite historical stage of overreflective [sic] bourgeois civilization could make the fact of consciousness the starting point of all theoretical philosophy, without characterizing more exactly the mode of being of this consciousness” (Scheler 1973b, p. 295).

However, it should be noted that the resistance suffered in the self-movement referred to above can only be experienced at the core of one's being, by which is meant the level of the "self" that Scheler "provisionally defined as the center of vital drives [*triebhaftes Lebenszentrum*]" (Scheler 1973b, p. 321). This center is "the genuinely central experience of our life of straining and striving [*Drängens und Strebens selbst*]" and forms the core of the "self".¹¹ This is because what one gets "thrown back" onto in the *reflexive act* is the "ecstatic [*ekstatische*] knowledge", which is a knowledge that one possesses without being aware of having it or how it was had—that is, a knowledge that "includes no form of being-conscious".¹² It is in this reflexive act that one becomes consciously aware of a transcendent object because in this act ecstatic knowledge becomes conscious knowledge since the "knowledge of the knowledge of things is added to the knowledge of things" (Scheler 1973b, p. 294). According to Scheler,

"Only when the . . . act furnishing ecstatic knowledge and the subject which performs this act become themselves the content of knowledge in the act of reflection does the character originally given in ecstatic knowledge become a mere reference pointing to the "object". It is only here that the object or that which turns into an object remains from now on "transcendent" to consciousness. Therefore, whenever there is consciousness, objects transcendent to consciousness must be given to consciousness. Their structural relationship is insoluble. Whenever self-consciousness and consciousness of an object arise, they do so simultaneously and through the same process". (Scheler 1973b, p. 298)

What is important to note from this passage is that for Scheler, conscious awareness of the self can only be triggered by an entity that transcends the conscious subject.¹³ To prepare the foundations for exploring the implications of this claim to religious experiences in the sections below, let us now turn to the movement of love and the two attributes Scheler discerns from it. For it is through the interdependence of these two attributes of drive impulsion (*Drang*) and spirit (*Geist*) that Scheler holds that human beings experience the world.

2.3. Movement of Love and Its Attributes

The notions of tendency, self-movement, self-modification, resistance, and reflexive acts, all of which lead to consciousness as a form of knowledge in living creatures, bring us to the question of how these concepts could be reconciled with the primordial givenness of love in human persons, as Scheler claimed in his earlier works such as *Ordo Amoris*, *Ressentiment*, and *The Formalism*. The pressing question to ask is whether by "tendency" Scheler is referring to the primordial love, which he described as the "tendency . . . that seeks to lead everything in the direction of perfection", "a dynamic becoming, a growing", a primal act that "awakens both knowledge and volition", and "the mother of spirit and reason itself" (Scheler 1973c, pp. 109–10). My line of reasoning is based on the presupposition that this "tendency"—what we pointed out above as a self-positing eternal *Substance* of which we only know two attributes (*Geist* and *Drang*)—is love. This is because with these notions of love and tendency, as part of a primordial movement in living creatures that leads to self-consciousness, Scheler seems to be referring to a *motivating* eternal entity that is beyond time itself, an entity out of which human beings can conceive of anything that *is*, an entity that is not relative to anything else, and an entity that transcends the division between essence and existence.¹⁴ According to Scheler, "Whatever is involved in this basic foundation of everything, it is eternally self-positing and we are in it" (Scheler 2008, pp. 206, 213, 294, 352, 355). My presupposition that this self-positing eternal *Substance* is love also entails that its movement—the movement of love as eros and agape—provides the "golden thread" for claiming continuity in Scheler's thought.¹⁵

This presupposition made above demands an exploration into Scheler's two attributes of spirit (*Geist*) and the principle of drive impulsion (*Drang*) in relation to his notion of a primordial movement of love.¹⁶ Scheler describes spirit, on the one hand, as "the one

ultimate ground of all entities of which life happens to be one particular manifestation". Spirit transcends life itself and is essentially detached from any organic being or any bodily "drive-related "intelligence" (Scheler 1992a). Furthermore, this spirit is a constituent of the "World-Ground" (*der Weltgrund*) that is realized in the process of becoming.¹⁷ Drive impulsion, on the other hand, is the basic need for the continuous self-activation of a living entity to self-modify that leads to consciousness in human beings, animals and, to an extent, even in plants' "general impulsion toward growth and reproduction". Although what is meant by growth could differ in human beings and animals, in general, Scheler sees this drive of self-propagation in living entities as proof that life is not defined by "the will to power" but rather by impulsion towards reproduction and death (Scheler 1992a, p. 8).

An explanation of how these two attributes of *Drang* and *Geist* mutually interpenetrate has been provided by Manfred Frings who describes them as metaphysical principles of spirit and impulsion. According to Frings, the respective natures of these two principles allow them to form the process by which the ever-becoming "World-Ground" is realized: impulsion yearns in the direction of the ideas and values of spirit, while spirit longs to direct impulsions towards the realization of values that constitute the "World-Ground".¹⁸ In other words, what Scheler meant by an impotent spirit relies on a potent drive impulsion to participate in the realization of essences of objects and the world, and vice versa. It is important to note that the drive impulsion in itself does not possess reality, but only has the potential to become real (under the direction and guidance of spirit). Thus, the two principles complement each other in such a way that "impulsion is the twin of spirit, and spirit is the twin of impulsion". In Frings' words,

"The tendency in impulsion towards spiritualization is referred to by Scheler as *Eros*. *Eros* "motivates" spirit; the direction of pure spirit to impulsion is *agape*. *Agape* is spirit's "benevolent affirmation" of being, and of the being of values, and spirit craves and yearns (*die Sucht*) for the realization of its ideas by means of impulsion. Or: primordial spirit has only a direction toward the realization of its ideas and values by virtue of impulsion's for all time yearning to realize them. Since impulsion is, like spirit, primordial, impulsion is also the primordial realizing factor from which all the historical and individual realizing factors . . . follow". (Frings 2002, p. 99)

Frings' insight into the mutual dependency of impulsion and spirit echoes the interdependency that we see in the movement of the two attributes of love in the realization of values. On the one hand, there is an upward/ascending movement of love (as *eros*) that is characterized by the craving and yearning to become spirit and the ego's desire to attain knowledge and mastery of objects and the world, and on the other hand, there is a downward/descending movement of love (*agape*) that is yearning to realize the being of values. Figure 1 below provides a visualization of this movement of love in the form of a parabolic curve.

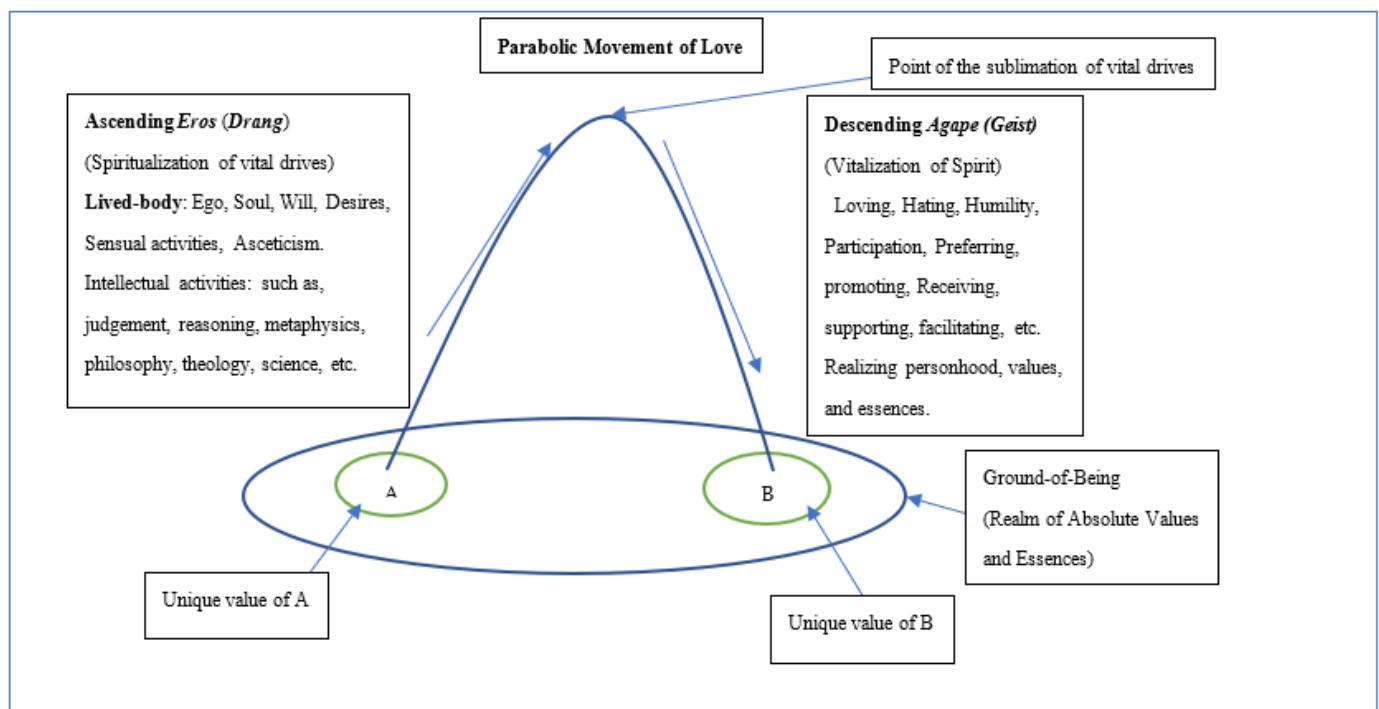


Figure 1. A visualization of the movement of love showing the directions of eros and agape, the point of sublimation of drives, and the World-Ground.

The visualization shows a parabolic movement of the attributes of love, eros, and agape, which could be said to move in an upward and downward direction as we saw above. Ascending eros is characterized by the striving of the ego, through asceticism, to attain knowledge; while descending agape is characterized by spiritual participation and service through which value or essence is given. It is in this descending movement of love that the whole person participates in the spiritual act of loving service that, as Arthur R. Luther puts it, provides “space” for the beloved person *to be*.” (Luther 1970, p. 225). This means promoting, supporting, and in fact, “facilitating” the beloved to attain a higher being of value (Vacek 1982, p. 163). It should be noted that *to be* for Scheler is having the capacity for emotive spiritual loving, by participating and realizing one’s unique value. Providing space for a person *to be* in this sense may not be reduced to Heideggerian or Derridian “letting be”, which refers to what thought gains access to the Other (Serafini 2016, pp. 484–85). The descending movement of agape is thus characterized by the givenness and realization of values, the highest of which are the religious values such as awe, humility, repentance, reverence, and bliss.¹⁹ It is the realization of values that constitute the history of the world as the unfolding of the “World-Ground” (*der Weltgrund*) or “Ground-of-Being”. For each unique value realized in a person or object is the eternal substance in them (Frings 1980, p. 142) that is received when a person A promotes the realization of the unique value of B. I argue elsewhere that for Scheler values are realized and received only in this descending movement of agape, by which I define his concept of humility. Values are in this sense felt as gift-wrapped in humility.²⁰

Given what we have hitherto discovered about the primordial movement of tendency and love we could conclude that, for Scheler, the movement of the heart does not only refer to the mechanical or physical movement as we see in Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas, mentioned above. Rather, this movement refers to a primal movement that occurs at what constitutes the core of a human being, i.e., a movement from what Scheler calls the *act center* of a person which is the site from where an individual suffers resistance and gains consciousness of the world and self. Hence, this primal movement neither refers only to a primal animateness (See Sheets-Johnstone 2011), nor is it concerned with movement relating to external perception only as in Husserl, who seems to have rejected the possibility of a

vital consciousness that operates without an ego, despite possible parallels with Scheler's thought elsewhere.²¹ As Dermot Moran pointed out, "An egoless consciousness is, for Husserl, an a priori impossibility" (Moran 2009, p. 89).

Movement of Love and Sublimation

Having described the movement of love in the form of a parabolic curve, the question arises as to what the turning point of this curve represents.²² This paper argues that the turning point of this curve is the sublimation of drives by which spirit is provided with vital drive energy to manifest itself. In *The Human Place*, sublimation is defined as "the human being's ability to say 'No' to his drives that paves the way from an inadequate knowledge to an intuitive insight." (Scheler 1992a, p. 40). According to Scheler, this ability to repress drives is not a "fortuitous quality", but part of the *constitution* of human beings who are never at peace with their surrounding world and are always desiring to transcend this world including the reality of their own self.²³ Sublimation places the human being in a position to "build an ideal realm of thoughts" above their world of perception and "thereby to divert more of the energy dormant in the repressed drives into his spirit". This enables the human being to become "world-open" and no longer tied to the bondage of organic dependence on "life" and everything which belongs to life (Scheler 1992a, p. 40).

However, sublimation should not be reduced to an asceticism or repression of drives that would suggest a Freudian hierarchical divide between body and spirit (Hackett 2018, p. 32). What is sublimated is the lived-body that extends beyond just a body and encompasses the ego and the soul, all of which are located in the "meta-biological ground of life itself" (Frings 1980, p. 137). Scheler himself sees human beings' distinctive ability to sublimate sexual or erotic energy, from serving only the sexual and reproductive act, into Eros as the most important act to this end (Scheler 2008, p. 230). This is because the sexual energy and its reproductive system are "the oldest, most original and most energized" of the drives: the only drives that are directed toward another creature and, hence, the only drives that "provides a reservoir for Eros as a participating act" (Scheler 2008, p. 233). Scheler thus rejects what he describes in *The Human Place* as the "negative theory of the human being" that claims that repression of drive energy directly provides our capacity for higher cultural activities, a position he not altogether accurately, perhaps, ascribes to Buddha, Schopenhauer, and Freud.²⁴

Looking at Scheler's concept of sublimation from the perspective of the movement of love, we could argue that it is sublimation that paves the way for a reversal in the direction of movement from the lower aspiring to the higher, to the higher stooping down to the lower in a loving act of humility. The parabolic curve of the movement of love describes how human beings become conscious of themselves and the world. The turning point of this curve is the distinctive feature, the important moment of the sublimation of drives by which human beings attain spiritual readiness to be guided towards the realization of essences and the Ground-of-Being. Scheler remarkably describes this moment as "sweeping aside anthropocentric drives".²⁵

The movement of love thus shows how Scheler blends the lived-body drive activities in eros, such as rational and sensory knowledge including metaphysics, with spiritual intuitions such as preferring and co-participating in agape in the realization of values and essences. This blending is key to his view on how best human beings can "possess" God. According to Scheler,

"We cannot now avoid seeing that the most adequate possession of God, the maximal participation of our being in his, cannot be achieved unless we first attain to a *simultaneous vision*, free from all contradictions and incompatibilities, of the religious God and the metaphysical 'world-basis' together. It follows that we cannot achieve this goal by wholly or partly making either the religious God or the metaphysical 'God' the yardstick against which we measure the *other* intentional object". (Scheler 1960, p. 141)

I argue that, for Scheler, this *simultaneous vision* could only be achieved in the descending movement of agape through loving participation in the unique personal value of an entity.²⁶ The movement of love has significant implications for religious experiences.

3. Movement of Love and Religious Experience

In the first part of this paper, I argued that, for Scheler, consciousness is a kind of knowledge generated from the primordial spontaneous self-movement and self-modification in human beings and the resistance suffered at the core of our being. In this sense, consciousness is not a given primal act but the outcome of the suffering of transcendence at different levels of being. Consciousness is always a becoming. The primal movement is motivated by the tendency in the two attributes of a self-positing eternal Substance, *Drang* and *Geist*, through which the becoming of the “World-Ground” or “Ground-of-Being” is realized. I argued that these two attributes constitute the two attributes of love, *eros*, and *agape* and that it is in the movement of love that essential values and their ranks are realized through the articulation of the whole person in the loving act towards the beloved object. The highest realms of values that can be experienced in this movement of love are the religious values of the holy and unholy and their corresponding spiritual feelings of personality that stem from an ego-free and intertwined spiritual act of love, humility, and participation. According to Scheler, spiritual feelings, such as bliss and despair that “spontaneously issue from the depth of our person are beyond any volitional control” and are, as such, non-reactive and not “subject to arbitrary production”.²⁷ This means that these feelings cannot be desired, rather they “present themselves . . . as pure ‘grace’” (Scheler 1973a, p. 337) and, hence, they are beyond intellectual activities.

Now, what then does Scheler take to be the source of spiritual feelings and, as such, of religious experiences? To answer this question, it is necessary to consider how the movement of love relates to the concept of the religious act by establishing what exactly is meant by religious experience in present-day studies. Given that even though there seems to be a general agreement among scholars as to its mysterious nature, and hence its unknowability through scientific methods, there seems to be less agreement on what its object and even its source should be. For some scholars, the mystery of God is unquestionably the object of religious experience, while for others, God cannot be the subject of experience since God is unknowable as the subject (Louchakova-Schwartz 2019, pp. X, 1–22). Outside of such theistic views of religious experience, there is also the non-theistic view that claims that religious experience need not have an object at all. That is to say, religious experience is taken to be the experience generated from a subject’s inner self without any reference to any entity that transcends this inner consciousness, as experienced for example in certain strands of Buddhist meditation. Consciousness is in this sense seen as having spontaneous creativity that can generate specific experiences and is seen as a “*sui generis* activity of religious experiences” (Louchakova-Schwartz 2019, p. 101).

However, when we speak of an object in relation to a religious experience, we also need to ask what role the object plays in this experience. That is, (i) should the object be what is contained in the religious experience itself? (ii) Should the object be that which structures the religious experience? (iii) Should the object be that to which the experience is aimed at as a (teleological) goal? The possibility of distinguishing a religious experience from other forms of experience thus hinges on determining the role of the object in experience or if an object is involved at all. Scheler is, for example, primarily concerned with the intended object of a religious experience; that is, its “*nature and essential structures*”, and not on “the chaotic random world of individual religious experiences”.²⁸

In light of the above, it is necessary to first explore the object-related view of religious experience, and question whether religious experiences are indeed solely the act of consciousness. For, if consciousness is knowledge as Scheler claims, and if there is a general agreement among scholars that religious experience is actually a mystery that cannot be characterized as knowledge, then what exactly constitutes religious experience? Secondly, we should question what exactly is meant by the description of religious experience as a

mystery. Do we mean mystery in terms of the unknowability of the object of experience, which Scheler takes to be an anti-metaphysical stance, or do we mean to refer to a mystery as a form of mystical or emotional intuition of a (divine) entity?

3.1. Object-Related Religious Experience

3.1.1. Religious Act

In attempting to explore the object of religious experience and the mystery surrounding it from a Schelerian perspective, I will develop my argumentation by turning to Scheler's concept of the religious act which in his view constitutes all religious experiences. To begin with, for Scheler, religion is necessarily a longing for salvation and not a way of knowing an object belonging to the world. "Religion is . . . founded in the love of God and longing for a final salvation of man himself and all things. Religion is thus pre-eminently a way of salvation" (Scheler 1960, p. 138). What Scheler means by salvation is the process of becoming that culminates in the "vital communion with God" (Scheler 1960, p. 134). That is, a process by which human beings and the world become one with God in the realized "Ground-of-Being" or "World-ground".

This process of salvation is made possible in human beings by the insight-providing religious act, which is *antecedent* to all other forms of cognition, including philosophical cognition (Scheler 1960, p. 152). This religious act, Scheler claims, is a surplus power of the mind with which it "*participates* in a supersensual realm of being and value whose contents and objects cannot stem from experience of finite things" (Scheler 1960, pp. 263–264). This surplus power also enables the mind to soar "above any employment it can find in this world", and find fulfillment only in self-revealing divine entities that transcend the psycho-physical world. Thus, for Scheler, the religious act does not proceed from any ethical, logical, or aesthetic acts, as it is given prior to any of these acts whose objects of intention are found in the psycho-physical world. Scheler's assertion entails that the religious act is not relative to any kind of *Weltanschauung* but is rather an "essential endowment of the human mind", whose presence no individual can escape (Scheler 1960, p. 267).

However, given the diversity of religions and religious experiences, the occurrence of the religious act in every human being suggests that the object to which this act is directed could be the source of the differences. After all, for Scheler, the object of a religious act determines what qualifies as a religious experience. This is because although the religious object can only find fulfillment and realize its essence in a divine entity, this act can also be redirected to a finite object that will result in idolatry (Scheler 1960, p. 267). Hence, for Scheler, we can only speak of religious experiences in reference to a divine object that transcends all finite things.

3.1.2. Religious Experience

Given the importance of an object in the religious act, the question that now needs to be addressed is the role this object plays in a religious experience. For Scheler, the object of a religious act is the object in which one participates, and it is the realized value of this object that structures the religious experience that is given. According to Scheler, in examples of religious acts, such as praise, love, veneration, or worship, "our mind oversteps the bounds not only of this or that one finite thing, but of the very sum and substance of all finite things" (Scheler 1960, p. 253). Overstepping all finite things allows us to participate in an entity that is a "wholly other", and it is the value of this wholly other that structures the religious experience. The point Scheler seems to want to drive home is that in a religious experience our minds, hearts, and wills, are directed by the religious acts to a "wholly different realm of essences" that were previously unknown and beyond comprehension.²⁹ The religious act directs us "toward some thing which 'is' and has value, something which hovers before our mind over against all possible world-experience as the 'totally other', 'essentially incomparable' thing, which the former can in no wise contain" (Scheler 1960, p. 253). It is the value of this entity that structures the religious experience and is also the "what" of the experience itself. Hence, if the religious act is directed to God, then it is the

value of the personhood of God that is experienced. This experience is the unplaceable fear, awe, and humbling that we feel in the religious act.³⁰ Therefore, as in spiritual participation, wherein a unique value of the beloved object is realized, it is the object of the religious act that constitutes the “what” of religious experience.

3.1.3. Mystery in Religious Experiences

For some scholars, the inability to place the value of a divine entity given in a religious experience is a source of mystery that is interpreted as the unknowability of the objects of these experiences. However, Scheler sees the emphasis on mystery altogether as an exaggerated form of mysticism that leads to what he describes as an anti-metaphysical notion of agnosticism since he takes metaphysics itself to be an important part of the process by which the value of a divine object is experienced.³¹ According to him,

“What metaphysics aims for is to reveal the mystery of the world, but not just in the way of a silent, thoughtless reverence for it, leaving it alone as an uninvestigated jewel. On the one hand, it takes the view that what is absolutely real is not completely unknowable, but, on the other hand, it is not so foolhardy as to assume that we can gain more than an inadequate knowledge of all possible essences, all possible ways of being, or all attributes of what is absolutely real”.

(Scheler 2008, p. 28)

Note the fact that, for Scheler, metaphysics leads us not only to the knowledge of objects in the psycho-physical world but also of objects that transcend us as “wholly other”, through the religious act as we saw above.³² It is this knowledge of a divine entity that is the source of the mystery experienced as fear, awe, wonder, hope, thanksgiving, etc. According to Scheler, in *religious hope*, we fervently hope for this thing even though we have no well-grounded evidence that gives us confidence this hope will be fulfilled; and in *religious thanksgiving*, “we give thanks for ‘something’ in relation to which what we have acquired is only a sign, indication or symbol, and not the proper object of the thanks . . .” (Scheler 1960, p. 252). Mystery in religious experience could in this sense be seen as a reception of knowledge of a divine entity that does not fit into the realm of knowledge of the psycho-physical world.³³

3.2. Religious Revelation

The experience of awe is also present in religious revelation, which is the most distinctive characteristic of the religious act. Religious revelation entails a demand for an answer from the object to which the religious act is directed. Scheler refers to this demand as an “*act of reciprocity*” and claims that “one may only speak of ‘religion’ where the object bears a *divine personal form* and where revelation (in the widest sense) on the part of this personal object is what fulfils the religious act and its intention”.³⁴ The demand for a personal response (through participation) from the object of the religious act makes religious revelation “a *necessary and universally valid knowledge*” because *what* is revealed is given as generally (known) symbols that are accessible to everybody through the religious act.³⁵ Hence, Scheler’s assertion is that revelation is simply the manner in which “*a reality of the divine character is given to human consciousness*” (Scheler 1960, p. 254). In other words, revelation is the manner in which the value of the object of the religious act is given in human beings.

Scheler’s emphasis on the personal character of revelation does raise the question of whether he sees Christianity as the most perfect religion, as pointed out by Michael D. Barber. According to Barber, Scheler’s claim of the necessity of a personal character of the divine object entails that one must wait for this person to reveal themselves, and accordingly, Scheler, by placing “a priority on the divinity of Christ . . . entertains the question of whether Christianity is the most perfect religion”.³⁶ In his early period Scheler did refer to God as the *ens a se*, and that can also be seen in various parts of the “Problem of Religion”.³⁷ What is more, he in fact referred to “the one true God” to whom “our hearts

and minds have a natural bias [and] a natural link of significance" in his essay "Christian Love and the Twentieth Century" in his criticism of what he saw to be Marx's presupposed messianism (Scheler 1960, pp. 398–99). Therefore, Barber's claim about Scheler's early view on Christianity seems accurate.

However, Scheler's latter metaphysics suggests that his insistence on the personal character of a divine entity does not imply the capacity of this entity to reveal itself as a person figure, but rather his insistence has to do with the capacity of this entity to love, to participate.³⁸ This is because Scheler believes that it is only in this *act of reciprocity* (spiritual participating in an interpersonal loving relationship) that the highest value can be co-felt. This means that a relationship with a non-personal entity will not realize such a value. Thus, we could argue that for Scheler the religious act is in fact an important attribute of the movement of love that motivates human persons toward participating in the value of a divine entity.³⁹ This implies that the religious experience of bliss could be taken to be the loving response one feels from a divine entity, and a religious revelation taken as a response that is also a "knowledge" of the unique personality of a divine entity. That is to say, knowledge in which "we can grasp what is original to the personality" of the divine being.⁴⁰

Thus, we could conclude that the necessity of the personal character of a divine object enables the revealing of the value, but not necessarily the human nature, of the divine. For Scheler, it is our shared personhood in the movement with God that binds us as partners *en route* to realizing the ultimate ground of the world or Ground-of-Being (Frings 1980, p. 142 and Scheler 2008, p. 208).

3.3. The Religious Act and the Sphere of Nothing

As we have seen above, for Scheler, religious experience is only possible through the religious act, which is a surplus of consciousness that is given to every human being and is always directed to either an object of divinity or redirected to a finite object. While the religious act finds fulfillment in a divine object only, redirecting the act to a finite object is idolatry. The question now is, what would the possibility of a religious experience without an object imply? In other words, how could we reconcile Scheler's claim of the necessity of the religious act with other notions of a religious experience without an object? Olga Louchakova-Schwartz, for example, has pointed out the possibility of a nontheistic religious experience, such as in Buddhist *bodhicitta* that does "not have a sense of the numinous about it and is not configured as God experience but rather shows up as how Buddhists themselves term it, as the enlightened mind of compassion" (Louchakova-Schwartz 2019, p. 102).

It should be noted that for Louchakova-Schwartz, religious experience is a creativity of consciousness and is strictly "a private, internal event pertaining to the sphere of ownership" belonging to the "region of individual being, that is, to one's inward psychological universe". Religious experience is in this sense "a one-time event, unreproducible, spontaneous, resisting generalizations, and belonging to the self". Furthermore, Louchakova-Schwartz holds that "religious experience is also not perspectival" in the sense that it does "not add up to constitute a whole picture of the Holy, or a whole picture of the Numinous" because each experience is a "moment complete in itself" (Louchakova-Schwartz and Crouch 2017, p. 672). What then distinguishes religious experiences from other experiences is, for Louchakova-Schwartz, the instant conversion of an emotion into another, such as anger changing into compassion, which she describes as "transmutation".⁴¹

Thus, Louchakova-Schwartz's notion of religious experience belonging to "one's inward psychological universe" clearly contrasts with Scheler's view of religious experience. The question that now arises is whether the former's view then amounts to what Scheler regards as a mystical technique—which he takes to be an attempted escapism from life into higher things (Scheler 1960, p. 12). To further explore this question I will now address Scheler's notions of nothingness, and the spheres of inwardness and expression.

3.3.1. Nothingness

Scheler makes a distinction between relative nothingness and “*Absolute nothingness*”.⁴² Relative nothingness refers to an *absence* in relation to another entity, such as the absence of human beings, the world, or anything at all that the world contains. Scheler describes this as “the not being there of one [finite] object in a situation where there is some other [finite] object”. In other words, for each finite being-so of an object, there can be a host of not-being-so, from which follows that we could speak of a “relative non-being” of any other object that *is*.⁴³ In this sense, the principle of non-contradiction applies only to “a relationship between relative being and relative non-being” (Scheler 2008, p. 382).

However, the principle of non-contradiction does not obtain the concept of Being, which cannot *not be*. “*Absolute nothingness*” is meant to denote the absence of any form of being at all; that is, “a state of complete ‘non-being’”.⁴⁴ However, for Scheler, such a thought is impossible to conceive of although the attempt to conceive it reveals the most “valuable insight into truth itself, which is that “‘there is something’ or, better, ‘there is not nothing’” (Scheler 2008, p. 383). This is because “Being itself is an ultimate entity” that cannot be defined or derived from knowledge or consciousness.⁴⁵ The only thought that could be the opposite of being is “the ultimate thought of *absolute nothingness*”, which is a state of complete ‘non-being’” (Scheler 2008, pp. 381–82) that cannot be conceived of, or imagined, and therefore should not be confused with ‘relatively nothing’.⁴⁶ Frings explains the impossibility of this thought of absolute nothingness by the fact that the very thought of this concept turns it into an object of thought that *is*.⁴⁷

Thus, for Scheler, what is usually referred to as absolute “nothingness” is in fact a “relative nothingness” that belongs to the “absolute sphere of godliness” and stands in direct contrast to the “sphere of worldliness”. The former is the sphere of “non-effective being” (*Geist*) and the latter is the sphere of “effective entities” (*Drang*). In the light of this view, Scheler perhaps too quickly, without specifying the strand of Buddhism he meant, asserts that the ‘Nothing’ (Nirvana) that is referred to by Buddha is a parallel correlation to the contents of this world, which is the sphere of effective entities.⁴⁸ Hence, the notion of “Elimination of suffering” in Buddhist thought “means no more than to unmask, by means of spontaneously obtained knowledge, the chimera of objects existing independently of us”.⁴⁹ That is to say, we transcend into the sphere of non-effective being, the sphere of the spirit, where the question as to whether or not the contents of the world are dependent on our desires becomes redundant.⁵⁰

3.3.2. Inwardness

What are the implications of Scheler’s insistence on the necessity of a transcendent object in a religious act for the claim that religious experience is a private internal event belonging to one’s inward psychological universe only? For Scheler, inwardness [*Innes-ein*] is indeed a psychological sphere or psychological universe “through which the human being, at least, experiences a for-himself or for-herself [*Für-sich-Sein*] in the form of an immediate region of control of their actions” (Scheler 2008, pp. 169–71). However, this inwardness also refers to one’s life-center that relies on the resistance of an object that transcends it in order to *be*—that is, it belongs to one’s drive impulsion, one’s psyche—meaning that it cannot be the sphere of the “wholly other”.⁵¹ Hence, for Scheler, religious experience is only given when the religious act is directed to an entity that transcends the psycho-physical world, implying that a religious act directed to one’s psychological sphere, if this is at all possible, will in his view not count as a religious experience.⁵²

This means that Scheler’s understanding of a religious experience could not be the kind of “internal experience” that Louchakova-Schwartz describes in terms of an “embodied self-awareness”, “a self-affection”, “self-luminosity”, “self-fulfilled”, “inward self-transcendence of internal consciousness” or for that matter as a “mystical self-awareness in union with God”, all of which designate a religious experience in “phenomenologically material interiority” (Louchakova-Schwartz 2017). The notion of a “phenomenologically

material interiority” itself, whereby one performs a reduction on one’s own consciousness that leads to a union with God, is debatable from a Schelerian perspective. This is because for Scheler, a reduction is an ego-driven activity that remains within the lived body, and hence it cannot lead to a religious experience without the spiritual act of participation in a transcending object. Scheler’s position is underscored by Angela Ales Bello’s warning that religious experience should not be reduced to the psyche only and that there needs to be awareness of the role of spiritual acts (Louchakova-Schwartz 2019, pp. x–xi).

4. Conclusions

In the first part of this paper, I demonstrated that, for Scheler, human beings are endowed with drives and capacities that transcend and precede consciousness. Consciousness is in this sense not primordially given but is acquired through suffering resistance from an object that transcends the consciousness itself. Consciousness is thus a kind of knowledge that is always a becoming, i.e., human beings become conscious in distinct stages of their being. I also argued that consciousness is the consequence of human beings’ tendency toward self-movement and self-modification that is driven by the upward movement of love as eros. Love itself is what I took to be the self-positing eternal *Substance* of which we know only two of its attributes that are expressed as Spirit and Nature, Mind and Life, *Geist* and *Drang*, *Eros* and *Agape*. For Scheler, these attributes are pre-given and transcend the psycho-physical world but can nevertheless be grasped intuitively and, therefore, do not represent any form of monism with a parallel division between the psychic and the physiological realms as, for example, is the case in Spinoza (Scheler 2008, p. 143). The two attributes of love move in what I described as a parabolic curve—the upward movement of eros and the downward movement of agape—the turning point of which I described as the point where the drive of eros is sublimated into agape in the realization of values through participation in a beloved object. The movement of love shows how Scheler blends the lived-body drive activities in eros with religious intuition in agape to realize the values and essences of objects or entities.

In the second part of this paper, we saw that, for Scheler, the source of a religious experience is primarily related to the object to which the religious act is directed. A transcending object is always involved in determining the nature of this experience—“there is not nothing”. The religious act is a given intuitive capacity that is antecedent to and is a surplus of consciousness. This act is always directed to the absolute sphere that transcends the psycho-physical world and cannot be accessed through intellectual means but by intuition only. Now, given that the religious act is rooted in every human being, it “participates in a supersensual realm of being and value”, and that it is a given that is antecedent to all other forms of cognition, we could argue that for Scheler the religious act is a prominent feature in the movement of love. This movement of love, which is characterized by participating in the loving act (the gesture of agape) and in which alone the essence of this “wholly other” is given as gift-wrapped in humility, demands a personal character of the object of the religious act. The object of the religious act can thus only be said to be realized in the gesture of agape in the form of religious experiences, such as awe, worship, bliss, etc., where religious values of the holy and unholy are felt. Hence, it is in fact the intuition of the unique value (nature) of the personality of the divine entity in the movement of love that is generally considered to be the mystery of religious experience.

In short, Scheler’s distinctive blending of metaphysics with spiritual intuition in the primordial movement of love, out of which consciousness becomes in distinct stages of being, and his (essential) metaphysical insight that “there is not nothing”; provide a unique criterion for defining religious experience as the felt value personality of a divine entity.

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Notes

- ¹ Aristotle, *The Complete Works. Electronic Edition. The Complete Works of Aristotle. BOLLINGEN SERIES LXXI-2 Volume I.*
- ² Vincent R. Larkin explains that for Aquinas “the intellect and imagination cause emotion, such as concupiscence, anger, and the like on account of which the heart grows warm or becomes chilled”. The warmth and coldness of the heart make the heart move and, hence, he concludes that “the movement of the heart varies according to the diverse emotions and cognitions of the soul” (pp. 29–30). See Larkin (1960, pp. 22–30). A more recent publication by Anthony J. Steinbock provides a more detailed account of the profound role of the heart in human experience—the heart as the emotional core of the person, the heart as another dimension of evidence and cognition with its own mode of critique. See Steinbock (2021).
- ³ The discussion on temporality and spatiality is complex, and beyond the scope of this paper.
- ⁴ It is under the intellectual view of consciousness that notions as *subconscious* and *surconscious* fall, and perhaps the reason why Scheler hardly discusses the subconscious. See (Scheler 1973a, p. 392).
- ⁵ In fact, this paper will argue that tendency carries along with it the primary experiences of spatiality and temporality, and personhood, all of which are primordial and precede consciousness. (See Scheler (2008). Henceforth cited in this paper as *Posthumous Works*. Here, p. 165).
- ⁶ The word “Substance” should not be interpreted to mean an object or anything tangible. Perhaps an easier way to interpret this eternal Substance is to think of it as the “something” because of which Scheler claims “there is not nothing”.
- ⁷ Scheler’s concept of “Being” differs from the Heideggerian “Being”, which refers mainly to existence. For Scheler, being refers to motivating something to *be*. As A. R. Luther (1972) points out, for Scheler, being is loving.
- ⁸ This claim regarding the eternal substance was clearly given in the late works of Scheler, but it is also very likely that this eternal substance was also presupposed in some of his early works such as *On the Eternal on Man*. See also Peter Spader’s explanation of the development of Scheler’s thought from theism to panentheism in Spader, 2005.
- ⁹ See (Scheler 2008, pp. 203–14, 257, 294, 352, 355, 375, etc.). My presupposition is that what Scheler meant by this self-positing eternal Substance is love.
- ¹⁰ Scheler’s view of a primal movement that precedes consciousness is underscored by contemporary research in phenomenology, cognitive science, and neuroscience, in Maxine Sheets-Johnstone’s book *The Primacy of Movement*. Sheets-Johnstone holds that we discover ourselves as conscious subjects in kinetic spontaneity and that our capacity to grow and make sense of ourselves and the world, to become conscious, is grounded in our primal animateness. “In the beginning is movement” she declares. We discover ourselves through these spontaneous self-movements, “a felt unfolding dynamic”; and not by our being capable of consciously controlling anything. Sheets-Johnstone’s findings confirm Scheler’s insights into the primacy of a spontaneous self-movement and self-modification, which precede consciousness of the perceptual world. See Sheets-Johnstone (2011, pp. 118–19).
- ¹¹ See (Scheler 1973b, p. 320). This center of drive is also different from the conscious knowledge of our central will. Hence Scheler claims, “The consciousness of a drive does not lead to the experience of resistance . . . Rather, it is the primarily ecstatically experienced resistance [offered by the world] that first occasions the act of reflection through which the impulsive drive can now become a matter of consciousness”. In other words, consciousness only results from the resistance at the level experienced by the spontaneous self-movement, and not at the level of sensation. (p. 325).
- ¹² “Idealism and Realism”, p. 294. According to Scheler, such knowledge is “a relation to the world which is prior to the emergence of self-consciousness of reflection”.
- ¹³ Frings points out the distinction Scheler makes between ecstatic knowledge and knowledge itself, and the importance of a transcendent object in any form of consciousness. “The former is not related to an ego or a transcendence of objects, because the world is not an object in ecstatic knowledge. But the world can become an object when a reflexive act, in which an ecstatic act (*ekstatisch gebender*) turns onto itself, hits the central self as the starting point of acts . . . A transcendent object is, by dint of acts of reflection, part and parcel of any consciousness”. (See Frings 2002, pp. 140–41).
- ¹⁴ This passage from *Cognition and Work* seems to support my presupposition “‘*Mens*’ or ‘*spirit*’ is to us the X or the epitome of the act in the ‘knowing’ being through which such participation is possible . . . The root of this X, the motivating moment for the execution of the acts which lead to some form of participation, can only be the *taking-part* transcending itself and its being. We call this, in the most formal sense, ‘*love*’.” (See Scheler 2021, p. 14).
- ¹⁵ Gottlöber (2022, p. 3). (My arguments in defense of this claim are beyond the scope of this paper).
- ¹⁶ Scheler elsewhere (in Scheler 2008) also refers to these two principles as Mind and Life, or Spirit and Nature.
- ¹⁷ See (Frings 2002, p. 98). Scheler’s *Geist* differs from Hegel’s, for whom this concept is reasoned from the material world.
- ¹⁸ Manfred Frings describes this mutual dependency as a process of becoming and functionalization, or of spiritualization and realization. According to Frings Scheler’s notion of functionalization is the process by which “something not existing turns into existence by way of a mediator”. For example, colors need material surfaces to appear, and hence a color exists only when it

“functionalizes” with something else that enables it to be perceived. See Frings (2002, pp. 72–74), also Scheler (1973a). Cited in this paper as *The Formalism*. Scheler uses the example of “how laws are experienced as fulfilled or broken only in the “execution of acting” (pp. 141–42); and in *On the Eternal in Man* Scheler discusses how essential insights undergo a “functional transmutation” that allows us to understand that there can be the growth of reason itself (Scheler 1960, pp. 201–2).

19 In (Scheler 2008), Scheler points out how “Spirit realizes itself in the form of a person” in a movement from above to below; and a life realizes itself in the form of an organism in a movement from below to above (p. 367).

20 See my upcoming Ph.D. dissertation, “The Gesture of Agape: The implications of Max Scheler’s Concept of Humility as Loving Service”, in progress.

21 It is not my wish in this paper to suggest a simple opposition between Scheler and Husserl. The work done by Nam-In Lee on instincts, for example, has shown the possibility of a dialogue between Scheler’s account of primordial drives and Husserl’s complex account of instincts. See Lee (2020). I thank one of the reviewers for pointing out these parallels.

22 The turning point is also a reference to what Scheler describes in *The Nature of Sympathy* (Scheler [1954] 1970, p. 162) as “the great turning-point between the ancient and the Christian conceptions of love” (*der große Umkehrpunkt von der antiken zur christlichen Liebesidee*), see (Scheler 1973d).

23 Scheler shares the notion of restlessness in human nature as we see in the history of western philosophy in the works of Plato, Locke, Leibnitz, Spinoza, Hegel, etc., just to mention a few. It is important to note that for Scheler the cause of this restlessness is the movement of eros (nature) towards agape (spirit) and is thus not referring to the distinction between platonic objects and forms.

24 In (Scheler 1992a, pp. 41–43). The debate of whether Scheler’s reading of Buddha, Schopenhauer, and Freud is accurate is beyond the scope of this paper.

25 In (Scheler 2008, p. 67). Sublimation, it could be said, puts one in a position to “touch base” with the self-positing eternal substance that one shares with spirit, and it is in participating in another object that this base is touched.

26 Scheler’s views on the sublimation of drives and the blending of metaphysics with religion should not be seen as advocating a new form of asceticism that makes philosophers the only group of persons capable of realizing higher spiritual and religious values, as suggested by Ronald Perrin. This is because for Scheler although all human beings are endowed with the capacity to realize higher values, it is somewhat easier for the philosopher partly because of her capacity for making a distinction between a self-evident absolute entity from a non-absolute entity. See (Perrin 1971, p. 157).

27 According to Scheler, “Bliss and despair appear to be the correlates of the moral value of our personal being. And for this reason, they are the metaphysical and religious self-feelings par excellence. They can be given only when we are not given to ourselves as relates to a special area related to our existence (society, friends, vocation, state, etc.), and when we are not given to ourselves as existentially and valuatively relative to an act that is to be executed by us (an act of cognition or will)” (*Formalism*, p. 343).

28 For more on how Scheler distances his approach from William James’s view of religious experiences, see (Scheler 1960, pp. 291–92; Barber 2020).

29 Scheler thus rejects any mystical technique, within theistic religions that purports to reveal the reality of things, as bogus (*Posthumous Works*, p. 24) This is because what these techniques claim to be the reality of things is, in his view, only a presupposition what is already known. According to Scheler, “The mystic supposes that he has reached reality itself, by whatever method he proclaims—intuition, life, feeling—yet all he is doing is presupposing a belief or an idea that he already had, and then vaulting over [and ignoring] what he believes or knows, to claim a togetherness with reality. There is, however, no possible way in which the existence or nature of this reality can originally emerge from anything the mystic claims to do”. See also (Scheler 1960, p. 252).

30 See (Scheler 1960, p. 252). We envisage a being that “is different from any finite being and also from any being which is non-finite or infinite in some specific way (such as infinite time, infinite space, infinite number, etc.); we find ourselves directed toward something whose place cannot be taken by any finite good, however worthy of love, since religious love transcends the essential nature of all such goods”.

31 See (Scheler 1960, pp. 98–99). One of Scheler’s criticisms of agnostics is that they fail to see what he takes to be the (self-evident) metaphysical insight that “there is not nothing”; “that every possible entity must necessarily possess an essence and also an existence”; and that “there is an *absolute entity*”.

32 See details of Erich Przywara’s criticism of Scheler regarding the possibility of knowing the unknown in S. Gottlöber’s “Intuiting the Divine? Erich Przywara’s Critique of Scheler’s Phenomenology of Religion” in Gottlöber (2022).

33 Scheler’s critique of mysticism does not do justice to richer the history of mysticism as provided, for example, in the phenomenological accounts of mysticism in Steinbock’s (2007). I thank one of my reviewers for pointing this out to me.

34 This is not the case for “metaphysics the personality of the divine forms a never-attainable boundary of cognition, for religion this personality is the alpha and omega”. (Scheler 1960, pp. 253–54).

35 See (Scheler 1960, p. 254). For Scheler’s view on the “intrinsically universally valid truth” and an “intrinsically individually valid truth”, see p. 23.

- 36 According to Barber, “A potential difficulty with Scheler’s view is that his value theory argues that the absolute being must be personal, to which the religious act is coordinated in such a way that it must await a personal revelation. As a consequence, Scheler goes on to place a priority on the divinity of Christ because Christ, as the absolute being, is then able to offer a personal revelation of the absolute being correlative to the religious act, as opposed to considering Christ merely as a teacher alerting us to truths we might be able to discover by exercising our own cognitive capacities. For this reason, Scheler entertains the question of whether Christianity is the most perfect religion”. (Barber 2020, p. 272).
- 37 See (Scheler 1960, p. 333). I thank one of the reviewers for drawing my attention to this.
- 38 See (Scheler 1960, pp. 25–27). Basically, Scheler claims that metaphysics can attain knowledge of God’s attribute as an *ens a se*, but not the personality of God. The latter can only be felt in the interpersonal relation between human beings and God that is made possible by the movement of love.
- 39 Perhaps in addition to Peter Spader’s claim that Scheler’s move to metaphysics has to do with the latter’s struggle with “the problem of evil”, (Spader 2005) we could also add that another reason is Scheler’s insistence that a divine entity must have the capacity to participate in a spiritual loving relationship. Taking God to be an attribute of the eternal provides the needed reason for the possibility of reciprocal spiritual loving, which was a concern to Scheler. After all, the ground-of-being, the *ens a se*, cannot be an object of spiritual loving since nothing transcends it, and it is itself that in which spiritual loving is possible.
- 40 White (2001, p. 382). In this sense we could argue that Scheler seems to have dropped the notion of bipolarity and asymmetry in the relationship with God in his latter metaphysics.
- 41 Transmutation is a condition “... whereby one emotion turns into another, not as a shift between two emotions but rather as a change of quality within the same emotion: for instance, anger is not replaced by compassion but becomes compassion. This conversion of emotion happens instantly, perhaps, along with some dissociation and refocusing of attention. The direction of the change is always the same, repeated between sets of practice and therefore predictable: for example, anger always changes into compassion, not vice versa”. See Louchakova-Schwartz (2019, p. 85).
- 42 Frings identifies a third distinction of nothingness in Scheler, i.e., nothingness in terms of logical negation. See Frings (1977, 2002).
- 43 The same holds for concepts of emptiness and holes, which are “only intuitively grasped relative nothings—a negative state of affairs, *me on*”. See (Scheler 2008, p. 289).
- 44 See (Scheler 2008, p. 381). A state of non-being “is a state which we can further denote as an absence of being itself—i.e., an absence of anything whatsoever and not just an absence of the existence of something”.
- 45 See (Scheler 2008, p. 381). See also (Scheler 1960), where Scheler states: “... whoever has not, so to speak, looked into the *abyss* of *absolute nothing* will indeed completely overlook the eminent positivity inherent in the insight that there is something and not rather nothing; he will begin with one or other of the perhaps no less self-evident insights which are, nevertheless, posterior and subordinate in self-evidence to this insight, as for example the insight implicit in *cogito ergo sum*, or such intuitions as that there is truth, that there is judgment, that there are feelings, or that we have a ‘picture’ of the world”. p. 99.
- 46 P. Gorevan has criticized Scheler’s first essential insight as a false start because “It does not permit an experience of being of the depth and variety which is needed”. See (Gorevan 1995, p. 326).
- 47 Frings explains this by stating that “the concept of absolute nothingness is impossible because in thinking about it, it is already something in the thought of it. For this and other reasons, already Parmenides saw that this is the case and concluded that there is no nothingness but only ‘is’”. See (Frings 2002, p. 73).
- 48 See (Scheler 2008, pp. 115–16). Scheler, for example, did not specify the strand of Buddhism he was referring to and wrongly seems to have assumed that his description covers the variety of strands within Buddhism.
- 49 Scheler (1992b), cited in this paper as *The Meaning of Suffering*, here, p. 105.
- 50 For Scheler, this transcending into another sphere entails that for Buddha, knowledge is “an *emptying of the contents* of the world from our apprehension by severing the chain of desire that binds us to these contents and makes their existence possible... knowledge is primarily an abolition of all affirmations or denials of existence”. Knowledge is thus the locating of the void of “nothing”—in the sense that things no longer resist us—at exactly the point where things previously appeared in their separate existence with all their prominence, freshness, and splendor. See (Scheler 1992b, p. 105).
- 51 Frings also points out that, “Inwardness ‘is’ through its lived relatedness to what is ‘outside.’ Therefore, Scheler attributed to the unlocalizable life-center a ‘primordial suffering’ from what it is not. Inwardness must suffer ‘resistance’ in order to ‘be’ related to what is outside and, thus, to be able to be ‘for’ itself” (See Frings 1980, p. 138).
- 52 The sphere of the “wholly other”, as we mentioned above, is the sphere of spirit (*Geist*), which is the sphere of the absolutes, mentioned above, to which the religious act could find fulfillment.

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