

Between the East and the West: Comparative Culturological Features of Max Scheler's Sociology of Knowledge

AIVARAS STEPUKONIS

Lithuanian Culture Research Institute
astepukonis@gmail.com

The article begins with a brief introduction to Max Scheler's efforts to re-establish a kind of epistemological pluralism in the post-Kantian theory of knowledge as better accommodating the factual diversity of cultural thought traditions than the universalized European rationalism of the Enlightenment. The article goes not to discuss those parts of the Schelerian sociology of knowledge where questions of East–West intellectual interactions come to the forefront. Differences of historical metaphysical world-views are described along with the ways in which those differences had been conditioned by the cultural-social environments of one or the other civilizational region. It is shown how a particular cultural ethos may and does foster some forms of thinking while discouraging others. Some specific and practical prospects of the mutual complementarity of the East and the West, also the ways in which one civilizational center may enrich the other are suggested. The article ends with several critical remarks the main of which is that, in his sociology of knowledge, Scheler avoids discussing the linguistic and hermeneutical obstacles the East–West dialog is bound to face, enunciate, and eventually solve if it is to make any progress beyond its initial stages of enthusiasm.

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Max Scheler has been considered by numerous philosophers and historians of philosophy as one of the most original and independent minds in the phenomenological movement. His intellectual fame lies in the areas of ethics, anthropology, social philosophy, and philosophy of religion. The theory of value-based ethics propounded in *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal*

*Ethics of Values*¹, the analysis of the interpersonal world of human emotions unfolded in *The Nature of Sympathy*²,

1 Max Scheler, *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Values*, 1973; original: *Der Formalismus in der Ethik und die materiale Wertethik*, 1927.

2 Max Scheler, *The Nature of Sympathy*, 1970; original: *Zur Phänomenologie und Theorie der Sympathiegefühle und von Liebe und Hass*, 1913.

the sociological study of historical and cultural forms of knowledge proposed in *Problems of a Sociology of Knowledge*³, and finally, the doctrine of the originality and non-derivation of religious experience defended in *On the Eternal in Man*⁴, are but a few illustrations of what an immense contribution Scheler has made to the philosophy of the twentieth century.

Scheler was one of the first Western thinkers to incorporate the comparative cultural perspective into methodically multi-faceted philosophical, sociological, and historiographic studies by complementing the latter with insights drawn from non-European thought traditions. The purpose of this article is to single out and discuss the most important questions of the comparative cultural and social investigations undertaken by Scheler in the final phase of his life under the heading of the newly developed discipline he called the sociology of knowledge⁵. An outstanding feature of those questions stems from Scheler's determination to daringly juxtapose and creatively interconnect the specifically Western and specifically Eastern ways

of perceiving and conceptualizing reality.

Individual thinking, in Scheler's view, unfolds in a social environment that conditions in advance the objects the individual is given and the forms of feeling-perceiving-thinking in which those objects are knowable to the individual. To explore the relations and interactions between thinking and its social environment Scheler proposed a new sub-field in the social sciences – the sociology of knowledge – one of the most synthetic and hybrid scholarly initiatives in the West. A sociology of knowledge is a discipline that both demonstrates the sociological character of all knowledge and shows by means of case-studies how this character, expressed in the conditioning of socially shared knowledge by forms of human association, manifests itself in the real history of cultures. Its method relies on a comprehensive synthesis of essential, material and formal, *a priori* knowledge (e.g., What is knowledge, culture, history, society, etc., in and of themselves, and how are they related?), empirical-factual knowledge of sociocultural history, and a wide-ranging knowledge of related sciences (human biology, developmental & cognitive psychology, positive scientific methodology, etc.)

It has both a theoretical and a practical aim, the first being an ever clearer and more exact view of the interactive laws binding human knowledge to its social context, the second – a learned interpretation of the contemporary world's socio-noetic structures so that men inhabiting it learn, on the one hand, to appreciate the sociological situatedness of their knowledge, while, on

3 Max Scheler, *Problems of a Sociology of Knowledge*, 1980; original: „Probleme einer Soziologie des Wissens“, 1924.

4 Max Scheler, *On the Eternal in Man*, 1972; original: *Vom Ewigen im Menschen*, 1921.

5 Scheler introduced the term *Wissenssoziologie* in his essay entitled “Probleme einer Soziologie des Wissens,” published in 1924, which was then expanded and included in *Die Wissensformen und die Gesellschaft: Probleme einer Soziologie des Wissens* a year later. In fact, Scheler's designations of the new discipline were pliant and varied; sometimes he called it *Soziologie der Erkenntnis* or *Erkenntnissoziologie*, at other times he called it *Soziologie des Wissens* or *Wissenssoziologie*.

the other, freeing their minds from each and every improper type of sociological determination such as various deceptions, prejudices, and ideologies.

THE THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY: TOWARDS AN EPISTEMOLOGICAL PLURALISM

Scheler puts forth grave criticisms against Kant's thesis that the human mind has a stable, non-changing structure with a constant system of categories at its disposal which is identical from man to man, from culture to culture, from society to society, from epoch to epoch. This thesis is starkly opposed and uncompromisingly denied. "We reject," declares Scheler, "the notion that there is a certain *fixed*, 'inborn' functional apparatus of reason, given in all men from the beginning." Scheler calls it "Kant's theory of a static organization of reason" and sees it as another "idol of the Enlightenment."⁶ If it were true – Kant's theory – then a sociology of knowledge would not have too much to investigate. But its field of investigation is rich and bountiful. Problems of relativism, of cultural distinctiveness, of historical differentiation of thought-patterns, all these are genuine problems whose very existence repudiates the universal constancy of reason held by Kant. No, the intellect is in motion, it is alive and changing, it grows and diminishes in its functional powers of the subjective *a priori* – this is the presupposition that underpins every facet of Scheler's sociology of knowledge.

Even as Scheler opposed and ultimately rejected Kant's (among others) assumption of the absolute constancy and universality of the cognitive categorial apparatus of man, he now likewise repudiates what he calls the "traditional concept of an *absolutely constant* natural view of the world,"⁷ which, according to its proponents, must needs be identical amongst men in all places throughout all times and thus form the requisite basis and a point of departure for higher and more advanced conceptual systems. For Scheler, this is a mere coinage of the brain which dissipates as soon as the history of knowledge among various cultural communities as well as their different temporal stages of development is scrutinized and taken into account. Instead, Scheler propounds a new concept which he terms the '*relative* natural view of the world.' He defines it as follows:

[T]o the relative natural world-view of a group subject belongs whatever is generally 'given' to this group *without question* and every object and content of meaning within the structural forms "given" without specific spontaneous acts, a givenness which is universally held and felt to be *unneeded and incapable of justification*.⁸

It instantly becomes apparent that there must be as many world-views as there are *historical* units of human association. Moreover, the evidence that no world-view is going to be the same as any other comes as a matter of fact. Cultural groups indeed

6 Max Scheler, *Problems of a Sociology of Knowledge*, pp. 41, 51.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 74–5.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 74.

are dissimilar in what and how they think, feel, and will. Here may be recalled Scheler's apposite saying: "Spirits and demons are given to the primitives in their acts of perception as 'naturally' and indubitably as they are *not* given to us here and now." That is to say, the facticity of the primitives' *own* world-view is as *autoptical* as is our *own* world-view, and the two of them, apropos, happen to diverge in great measure.

CONTEXT I: THE BASIC TYPES OF KNOWLEDGE

The Schelerian typology of knowledge outlines seven types of knowledge: 1) myth and legend, as undifferentiated, preliminary forms of religious, metaphysical, natural, and historical knowledge; 2) the knowledge implicit in everyday natural language (in contrast to learned, poetic, or technical language; 3) the religious knowledge; 4) the basic forms of mystical knowledge; 5) the philosophic-metaphysical knowledge; 6) the positive knowledge of mathematics and of the natural sciences and the humanities; and 7) the technological knowledge. Out of the seven Scheler singles out the three basic types of knowledge – religious, metaphysical, and scientific – as the most decisive in shaping the course of Western culture. The East–West intellectual intersections receive the greatest attention in the discussions of the metaphysical and scientific types of knowledge.

East–West: Differences in Metaphysical World-View

While exploring the distinctive way in which the structure of metaphysical

knowledge is modified by the well-to-do estate Scheler determines that structure to depend on whether the aforementioned estate adopts the model of city-life or that of country-life with their biomorphic or technomorphic attitudes, respectively. Scheler contrasts Western metaphysics with Asian-Indian. He observes that "almost the entire metaphysics of the *West* is a product of *city* thinking."⁹ As such it is suggestive of the Western metaphysician's alienation from nature as both the theme and form of his meditation. Indeed, Socrates himself, who 'could not learn anything from the trees,' is, according to Scheler, a good example of a city thinker. The Western metaphysician's image of man, moreover, is one of a "*sovereign* being *above* all of *nature*," which is but unfamiliar to the Asian way of thinking. Its contemplative attitude is essentially *biomorphic*. The Asian metaphysician regards himself as a living component of nature, his thoughts are fraught with organic imagery, his cognition is quickened by an "almost metaphysical-democratic" consciousness of unity "with all sub-human life." He is a man of "forests" and not, like Socrates, a man of polis. That these and similar distinctions are of sociological origin is Scheler's point.

What is metaphysics' relationship to politics as a real factor co-determining its sociological mobility? In foreign policy we hear of wars, conquests and dissolutions, colonizations, politically directed trades, – what effect do these sociological forces exercise on a people's indigenous metaphysics? History instructs us that

⁹ Ibid., p. 98.

there are three generic possibilities if a given cultural mentality with its peculiar intellectual character is to undergo alteration: politically motivated battles as well as deaths and migrations caused by them may either destroy a culture's shared mind and reduce it to non-existence, or transform it by way of subsumption under another culture's categories of thought, or assimilate it within another people's spiritual and mental modes of life to produce a syncretism of culture, ethos, religion, and metaphysics.

Now, that the "expansions of power states [...] tend to effect mixtures among peoples so that the collective knowledge about the world *increases* with the increasing opportunity for cultural, productive, mutual contacts"¹⁰ is a fact well attested to by both the historian and the sociologist. It can also be claimed with relative confidence that the supracultural advance of science and technology in the East and the South has been in great measure initiated and fostered by the international extension of world powers with its military and economic "methods of persuasion." But the question remains: can political power and its international expansion be a medium of promulgation for metaphysical cognition? Scheler's response is a categorical 'No.' His conviction is that "every form of political power, and similarly every mission with particular objectives, is completely insufficient to spread metaphysical knowledge." A dominant power can make other lands and peoples into

administrative units of their own, it can mold and shape their material existence after the Western pattern by external industrialization and technologization, but they *cannot* affect "people's souls and, moreover, their metaphysical [...] views." Instead, in a magnificent passage Scheler proposes a novel vision of how exchange of metaphysical insights can be achieved:

The *metaphysical* dialogue among the irreplaceable great spiritual individuals belonging to the *cultural fields*, however, cannot be effected by political force, expedient missions, nor economic penetration joined by capitalization and industrialization of the economy in question. Rather, such a dialogue can come about only through a 'sublime and great discussion' (Schopenhauer) that transcends time and space and that the best representatives of the various cultural fields lead on metaphysical subjects – a discussion which is carried on in the [...] atmosphere of the *new 'cosmopolitanism of cultural fields.'*¹¹

Note, that the abundance of metaphysical questions in *Problems of a Sociology of Knowledge* does not consist in some kind of a clandestine agenda that Scheler is trying to sneak in under the guise of "a sociology." As the above statements indubitably show, the Scheler of the just mentioned essay takes on the credentials of a metaphysician no less than of a sociologist or a philosopher in general. Heretofore, this

¹⁰ Ibid., pp.158–60.

¹¹ Ibid.

being my first observation, it is 'the author's metaphysics' and, moreover, his manner of establishing its socio-historic "rights for existence" over against other forms of knowledge that we have gotten a general depiction of. Yet, there is another string of metaphysical interests that informs and excites the same work of Scheler's. It is the *factual state of degeneration* of metaphysics in contemporary Western society caused, as he puts it, by the concerted victory of "revealed religion, of exact science, and of technology [...] against a *spontaneous metaphysical spirit*."¹² Needless to say, for Scheler such a condition of Western culture appeared as a definite sign of its intellectual misery. This, however, is actually where things get interesting, for instead of singing dirges over the West's irreparable disintegration or spinning out a litany of long and futile castigations of how blemished, tainted, and ultimately bankrupt the West has become, Scheler instead sought the means for a cultural regeneration of the West, which, as he thought, in this particular case, had to begin with the rehabilitation and reinstatement of metaphysics in Western culture of intelligence.

He found his model in Asian cultures in which it is the "*sage* and a *metaphysical mind*" that prevailed and "won over religion as well as science." The latter dissimilarity, in fact, Scheler guesses to be the "most *significant difference between Western and Eastern cultures*." Thus, metaphysical knowledge becomes the point of transference between the two realms of cultures

and, since it is a problem of a *socio-noetic* character, it [metaphysics] thereby receives a unique status in Scheler's sociology of knowledge.

East–West: Differences in Scientific World-View

Both philosophy and technology, as two independent and original modes of knowledge, manifest a relative degree of self-sufficiency. As the history of cultures clearly indicates, technological accomplishments may thrive without ever coming into contact with philosophical insight, and, *vice versa*, love of wisdom may soar to incredible heights of speculation without in the least consulting the world of work-experience, its praxis and its needs.

Two of Scheler's historical examples will prove the point. The following is his portrayal of the ancient Greek intellectual culture:

Greek metaphysics and religion, in principle, affirms the world, its nature and existence, but neither as an object of human *work*, human building, ordering or prediction, nor as the object of a divine creative and architectural deed which man has to continue. Rather, their world is the realm of living and noble *energetic forms to be seen and contemplated and to be loved*.¹³

This purely appreciative *versus* utilitarian vision of the world precluded any constructive reciprocity between philosophy

¹² Ibid., p. 91.

¹³ Ibid., p. 103.

and technology. The one blossomed, the other was relatively unaccomplished. The triumphant leaps of mathematics, the speculative strides in cosmological and ethical thought evinced but little incentive for the manufacture of machines, for the betterment of tools, for the invention of new production techniques, things and processes which would, of course, greatly profit from the principles of *theory* had these not been turned into a seclusive club of pure meditation by the cheerful aristocracy of Greece. The ancient Greek's fame thus lies in the cherishing of things as concrete instantiations of the general excellences of beauty, goodness, truth, justice and the like *abstract* qualities. In the case of ancient Greek culture one is faced with the preponderance of theory at the expense of a technical-practical mentality. It is thus not by accident at all that we find no genuine practical science in Greece.

In contrast, if one looks at the achievements of the ancient Egyptian civilization, – be it its sophisticated architecture of mighty pyramids, or its inventive subjugation of the Nile River, or its prudent organization of the monarchy and its administrative apparatus, – these are the achievement of mostly *material-technological* nature. The Egyptian's genius, more often than not, has reached us in stone and marble and not, as in the case of the Greeks, in scroll and ink.¹⁴

14 Needless to say, this contrast is artificially sharpened here. The Egyptians were not just builders, they were the inventors of applied mathematics, they were leading astronomer of the time, they were also excellent scribes whose numerous inscriptions, usually in the form of epitaphs, we find in numerous subterranean tombs. Not to mention the literary value of *The Book of the Dead*. Similarly, the genius

And “if among these people,” notes Scheler, “there did not develop a methodological and cooperatively organized, positive disciplinary science which encompasses the whole universe and its divisions, it is here obvious that the *lack of free philosophic speculation* explains this failure.”¹⁵ As a result, in comparison with ancient Greece, Egyptian civilization exhibit a certain reversal, in that the predominance of practical-applicative thinking occurs at the expense of pure contemplative theory so peculiar to the Greeks. It is not by accident, either, that we find no genuine science in Egypt. But what is the matter?

On the one hand, we confront two basically *different* epistemic traditions with their own special cultural and noetic orientations and, on the other, we encounter the *same* outcome, to wit, neither the Greek rationalism nor the Egyptian pragmatism were capable of producing genuine science. This is a historic proof that philosophical and technological thought in turn can build entire cultures and civilizations and thus each can possess a mode of being quite independent from one another. This is a historic proof that philosophical and technological species of knowledge can evolve separately and autonomously from one another, that is to say, they *need not cooperate* in order to be what they are.

of the Greeks extended well beyond their poetry, prose, and philosophical writings. There was also the magnificent Parthenon of Ictinus & Callicrates and the gorgeous statues of Myron, Praxiteles, and Lysippus.

15 Max Scheler, *Problems of a Sociology of Knowledge*, p. 104.

Yet remember, it is precisely the cooperation of the two forms of knowledge that makes up the nature of science. Would not this imply that, for all we may learn from history, *science need not exist*, after all? In spite of this, however, we believe that at least in our contemporary Western civilization science is proudly taken to be one of our distinguishing cultural properties. There bulks the formidable fact that science *is a reality* for us so much so that its loss not only would deprive us of countless life expediences, but, more ominously, it would destroy our cultural identity and leaves us bereft of the spiritual self-image whose consolidation required two millennia of active enterprise in the mutual assimilation of philosophy and work-experience to generate a new kind of knowledge called science. And so, to stay with the examples I have used above, on the one hand, we have Greek philosophy, on the other, Egyptian technology. How is it, then, that the two can and do enter a combination, how is it that there springs up science?

What bridges the gulf between purely theoretical concerns and those concerns connected with the sustenance of one's livelihood, what mediates the cleavage between interests in ideal truths, essential intuitions, formal arguments, on the one hand, and interests in work-tools and household-management, on the other, is, according to Scheler, the energy of the 'will to power.'¹⁶ As such the will for power is a primeval datum of the psycho-vital constitution of man. Beside the sexual drive for the propaga-

tion of the species and the nutritive one for the propagation of the individual, the will for power is a third major category of drive-impulses in alliance with which the mind realizes and enacts, in accord with its *pure creative* representations, intelligible structures in the *real* world. Eventually, the will for power becomes specialized and differentiated; diverse objects may become its intentional targets and this in turn may affect the nature of its concrete manifestations. The will for power may thus take the form of an *inward* psychosomatic control as it was exercised, for instance, among the ascetic devotees of Asian religio-metaphysical schools and traditions through 'chastisements of the body' and 'purgations of emotions.' Or it may take the form of an *outward* political and legal control as it was handled by the historical representatives of Babylonian and Roman codices of law aimed at the regulation of the masses. Again, it can embody an economic frame and invest its energies in the "productive transformation of *things*" into "valuable goods."¹⁷ Once, however, the object of the will for power becomes *nature* itself, this is when the need to unite the theoretical knowledge of mathematics, geometry, essences, and logic and the practical knowledge of agriculture, cattle-breeding, crafts, and mining, etc., rises in all urgency, this is when there wells up a desire and a motive to let philosophy marry technology or technology marry philosophy and let the two conceive a child by the name 'science.'

Two caveats. Firstly, the will to control and dominate nature does not have

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 103, 105.

¹⁷ Ibid., 129.

its source in man's corporeal, vital, or psychic needs and wants nor is it an attempt to satisfy them. Instead, this will is sewn, as it were, in the very fabric of a people's ethos, it underlies and guides their practical and moral choices, and it is a factor in the molding of their common world-view. Secondly and more importantly, the will to control and dominate nature must not be confounded with the subjective intentions and motivations of an individual researcher, or of an individual group of researchers, or even of an individual tradition of scientific research. Someone may engage in science as if in a game, for him it is 'doing something fun and entertaining' and that is *why* he is a scientist; somebody else may view science as a path to public glory and fame; still another person can treat science as a way to train his intellect or he may be enkindled with genuine love for truth. All this is possible, and Scheler neither questions nor denies it. But none of the above-mentioned subjective motives cannot provide an answer to the questions, 'Why did science have a *sociological* genesis?,' 'Why is it a part of *history* and not of a single *biography*?'

The will to control nature is a phenomenon which, in Scheler's words, addresses the "*sociologically conditioned origin of the categorial apparatus of thinking* and of the objective goals of investigation with its impartial methods, which in the 'new science' [modern science] are effective beyond the will, wishes, and subjective intentions of individuals."¹⁸ In a somewhat rhetorical fashion Scheler goes on to ask: "Why, for

example, [in the categorial structure of scientific thought] does the category of 'quantity' gain primacy over that of 'quality,' the category of 'relation' gain primacy over the category of 'substance' and its accidents, or the category of 'laws of nature' gain primacy over that of 'form,' 'gestalt,' or, furthermore, 'type' or 'force?'" No direct reply comes to this question, but the suggestion, as I construe it, is that 'quantity,' 'relation,' 'laws of nature' and the like notions carry a certain significative perspective from which reason interprets the world in such a way that the latter appears as a *locus* for active intervention, a *locus* subordinate to external causation capable of transforming any of its [locus'] concrete configurations, a *locus* therefore inviting and, indeed, inciting the self-realization of the will to control. The pattern of thought which relies on such notions originates from the *group* of men, – and this is its sociological meaning, – whose will for power, in accord with their ethos, assumes the form of the will to *control nature*, a will *constitutive* to scientific knowledge and cannot be modified or removed from it by any subjective choosing, liking, wishing, intending, or preferring which may accompany any actual acquisitive act of scientific knowledge.

CONTEXT II: THE INTERCONNECTIONS OF THE BASIC TYPES OF KNOWLEDGE

Having provided a series of sociological analyses of religious, metaphysical, and positively scientific species of knowledge in [relative] separation from one another, Scheler undertakes a scrutiny of their interactions by purveying an account of the

¹⁸ Ibid., p.119.

diverse and varied cultural-institutional bonds that intertwine the three basic forms of knowledge and explaining the essential as well as factual-historical nature of their reciprocation. Under question are the three general sets of interconnections obtaining between the correlative pairs of science & religion, religion & metaphysics, and metaphysics & science.

East–West: The Prospects of A Spiritual and Material Encounter

The most fruitful and fascinating investigation into the sociological intercontainedness of metaphysical and scientific types of knowledge is, in my opinion, to be traced in Scheler's futural references to what he names 'a cultural synthesis of the West and the East' which he, in his time, envisaged first and foremost in terms of a marriage between the American-European science and technology and the Asian psycho-spiritual mastery of the soul.

Although some of Scheler's remarks at present may seem somewhat outdated, for the most part, they remain relevant even to this day, and can teach us Europeans a good lesson. Since the loftiest creation of Western civilization is its positive science, and since the cultural synthesis will be treated from the vantage point of the West, I shall mainly focus on what, according to Scheler, the Occident must learn from the Orient and not the other way around.

Let me start with the following insight, the disclosure of which Scheler attributes to the sociology of knowledge. It is this:

[I]n view of different racial dispositions, different relative natural world-views [...], *Europe* and *Asia* have approached possible problems of knowledge from fundamentally different directions: Europe's predominant direction has been *from matter to the soul*; Asia's has been *from the soul to matter*.¹⁹

Here we have two cultural vectors gravitating towards one another, because the point of departure for one is the end-goal for another. Both the West and the East are moved by a force of mutual attraction, so that each is motivated to make public its epistemic treasures, and in turn to savor the time-honored wisdom of its partner. The process whereby the great Western and Eastern cultures would cross-fertilize their cultures Scheler calls 'the cultural synthesis' or 'the new cosmopolitanism of cultural fields.' Asian man's fame dwells in his invention of techniques for psychovital control of *self*, he is the master of *self*-education, *self*-cognition, *self*-redemption, etc. With justice it can be said of him: he is the captain of his soul. Yet, he is no ruler of nature, no contriver of methods for productive efficacy, no physician of material ills.

In turn, the greatest credit of Western man lies in his scientific and technological genius which lead to the subjugation of the natural world, the rise of industry, and the betterment of man's living conditions. But the plight of Western man is that through his one-sided concentration on technological feats and the endless and extravagant manufacturing of

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 148.

commodities, he has “almost completely neglected and forgotten how to control his own *self*, his *inner* life.”²⁰

It gradually becomes evident that the strength of the one cultural hemisphere is the weakness of the other. The logic is relatively simple: one should seek to retain the outstanding cultural achievement of both European and Asian peoples and simultaneously to eradicate every form of spiritual as well as physical deficiency and shortage. Scheler believed that the temporal point of history at which humankind would be mature enough to pursue such a cultural synthesis was precisely the twentieth century. Thus it is our own age that was to bear the privilege to become the cultural mediator of the intellectual dialogue between the Occidental and Oriental traditions. Scheler states: “[W]e are of the conviction that in *Europe* and *North America* a *vigorous epoch of metaphysics and psychic techniques* is likely to follow the positive and technological epoch of so-called ‘modern times,’ while in *Asia* an epoch of *positive science* and *technology* will replace the strongly one-sided metaphysical epochs of these cultures.”²¹ What are some of the lessons the West ought to appropriate from the experience of the East as both embark upon a path of a new cultural synthesis?

As noted above, the Euro-American realm of culture for too long has been invaded by a desire to subdue man’s exterior surroundings, to lord it over all that is subhuman or even superhuman except (Western) man *himself*. In the wake of this

impulse there ensued a prodigious output of thinking, conceiving, creating, exploring, working, and constructing, of diverting all psychic and physical energies towards the whole of nature and the whole of the material cosmos and in this also towards man but merely to the extent that he was viewed as a part and a thing of nature (thus, towards man who is a *noman*, since he was insulated from his *personhood* with all of its ontic and moral implications). The definition of the word ‘methodology’ in the West was mostly a prerogative of positive science, it was interpreted as a study of *external*, *objective*, and *value-free* methods and procedures. Even the human sciences, philosophy notwithstanding, if they were to be methodological, they had to be so in the positively scientific way!

Hence, the first lesson Europe should learn from Asia is the idea of ‘psychic technique’ in the broadest sense of self-overpowering and self-control, a sense which goes beyond moral habituation, which has also had its own specifically Western tradition. I shall address four sociologically distinct spheres of Euro-American culture in which the Eastern idea and praxis of psychic self-mastery is, according to Scheler, first to ramify itself. Its most immediate effects should be expected in the socio-cultural fields of philosophy, general quality of life, politics, and population control. How is this to take place?

Scheler stresses that dealing with psychic techniques is also dealing with ‘method,’ only this time with *subjective* method, in contrast to the West’s exclusively objectivistic notion of it. Let us

20 Ibid., p. 139.

21 Ibid., p. 142

not forget that in the East the intellectual attitude generating the invention and refinement of these methods and techniques towards the inner ordering of man's soul was primarily *metaphysical*. It was such, however, in the sense of enabling the thinker upon his will to reproduce cognitive states and dispositions that would permit and sustain a most direct and intense contemplative bond between him and the characteristically metaphysical dimension of reality, not in the sense of automatically giving rise to positively loaded concepts, meanings, images, or contents. They [techniques] were not to 'make reality' but to pave the way to its proper experience. Thus comes the first area of application, and it is with respect to the manner of philosophizing in the West. The adoption of oriental psychic procedures is to serve "epistemological goals" at the heart of which is the "technical production of inner *dispositions* of mind and feelings, as it relates to the philosophical cognition of *essences*."²²

Note, that the mental technique of philosophical cognition does *not* refer to, what Scheler terms a "logical and epistemological theory of philosophy." Rather, it is a inner technique of inducing the intellect so that it is *inmosty ready* to intuit the essence of, say, philosophy and frame a 'logical and epistemological theory' thereof. Interestingly, even Husserl's method of 'phenomenological reduction' Scheler interprets as an 'epistemological-technical' endeavor to evoke states of *a priori* insight only subsequently "cloaked

by Husserl [...] in an apparent logical methodology."²³

All in all, the exhortation is this: The making of philosophical statements must be preceded by the making of philosophical attitudes. Too often thinkers of the West have rushed to practice the first, without doing or even considering the latter. This state of affairs can be corrected precisely by training oneself the psychic techniques that have been the peculiar achievement of Oriental metaphysical cultures.

Another way for Europe to benefit from its spiritual cooperation with Asia is to master the *ascetic* element of the 'power over one's self.' Much effort and sacrifice has been spent by the West to secure a relative degree of material comfort, to combat pain and suffering that stem from deficit of goods. To accomplish this Western man put to use all of his economic and industrial machinery. No doubt, much misery and many ills have been thus ended by tapping natural resources, by manufacturing ever greater numbers of goods, by raising the quality of production and practical efficacy, and by assuring ever better distribution of them in the market.

"The greatest state of satisfaction to the greatest number!" – shouted the nineteenth-century economic thinkers.²⁴

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ And before deriding it, one should first acknowledge that from a pragmatic point of view it is a sound and effective directive. It is merely the numerous theoretic explanations of its that so often tended toward simplistic and extremist solutions straying off the right path.

²² Ibid., pp. 140–1.

And it never remained just a slogan. European man took it seriously, acted on it, and made on its account a steady progress, – as steady, of course, as any historical process may aspire to be, a progress, that is, towards the betterment of general livelihood. But there are endless other troubles that are in store for Europe (as well as for the rest of the world), and the question arises whether the ways of coping with them should not be enriched *in kind* as opposed to an ever increasing *accumulation* of results by, in principle, one and the same strategy, i.e., by searching for the quality of life in the purveyance of material goods. Yes, the West ought to seek not just *more* means, but also *other* means. In Scheler's strong opinion,

[I]f in the greatest common task of humanity, namely, the elimination of ills and suffering [...] the external, evolving Western production of goods and active *struggle* against ills (i.e. by eliminating their *external* causes) becomes *unified* with the active, heroic art of sheer '*endurance*,' based upon psychic technique, (i.e. the *inner* inhibition of 'suffering') and the spontaneous, active care for the soul, [...] *complete* power over outer *and* inner nature [...] would be gained.²⁵

A human being's suffering can never be reduced to his external environment and its causal effects. It is essentially a relational phenomenon whose subjective component

stems from a complex interplay of inner psychosomatic receptive and perceptive processes as well as from diverse mental and volitional dispositions. What is significant is that it falls in the purview of man's abilities to take control of his inner life, to exercise the latent strengths of his soul and by using proper techniques to transform his experiential relationship with the evils of the world so that he would still "*see*" them as evils but no longer "*sense*" them as such.

Let me briefly consider two other Western cultural areas which, through the assimilation of the Asian idea of self-control, could undergo valuable changes. The first area is politics, and in the case of the European political arena, it is, as Scheler puts it, a "*negative politics of 'non-rule' and heroic non-resistance.*" The latter has sprung up through the West's ever keener reliance on principles of inner psychic orientation and the reinstatement of the soul's dominion over its environs. In just two sentences, Scheler manages to compress his entire explanation why 'negative politics' should be qualitatively preferred to 'politics of active defense.' To begin with, any positive tactics of resistance cannot escape *some moral* blemish because it is "volitionally sustained by the same drives and desires that are effective also in an adversary." The defensive, that is to say, proceeds by the same methods as the offensive, and if the latter is intent on slaughter and bloodshed, so too is the former.

In contrast, the species of negative politics, based on the principle of non-resistance, that, on the one hand, explicitly establishes its "*power to resist*," and, on the other, demonstrates that its "*endur-*

25 Max Scheler, *Problems of a Sociology of Knowledge*, pp. 141–3.

ance of insult and injury does not result from feebleness, cowardice, or anything similar,” such politics is twice superior to its counterpart of positive intervention, since it is at the same time ‘capable of fighting’ and ‘innocent of having fought.’ Negative politics of this sort represents a *victory* and a *vindication* in one. Now, the function of psycho-vital self-control in all of this represents the *deciding* factor on account of which ‘capacity’ never turns into ‘actuality’ and the state of affairs ‘I can resist, but I don’t’ is volitionally enacted. Self-control must not be confused with a condition of mere passivity for first and foremost it is a *function*. It is, furthermore, a *technical* function when it is accompanied by a procedural ability to demonstrate the control of one’s self upon one’s will.

But the use of techniques for self-control, especially in its vital-somatic aspect, has, according to Scheler, another promising field of realization, should the Euro-American world take proper heed of it. We are speaking here of the regulative problems of population or, if you like, the question of demography with an emphasis on *qualitative* population control otherwise known as *eugenics*. The predicament of the populations of Europe and North America in Scheler’s eyes is twofold. They have already grown too large, but still continue to multiply (Scheler quotes some great poet’s words “Already your numbers are an outrage.”), making prospective doubts ever more acute whether the supply of vital goods is going to be sufficient in the future. Their numbers, in addition, are at the expense of their quality.

The factor that spurs the increase of birth-rates in the West and causes the present state of overpopulation is as follows: The development of Western history has been predominated by a principle that “demands special objective and subjective justification for *non*-participation in procreation for the sake of effectively decreasing the number of children.” Child-bearing followed from the mere capacity to bear, no qualifications added. In contrast, the acceptance of various techniques for vital self-mastery, techniques that place the “art of endurance and the *primacy* of man’s self-control *prior to* his control over nature, must necessitate the opposite principle: that all *participation* in the procreation of the human species is to be tied to the special right and even *privilege of a minority* of people who promise ‘good’ hereditary qualities and who are certainly or with only average probability exempt from negative hereditary qualities.” Under this principle, in order to bear children it is no longer sufficient that a woman simply can bear them, or a man simply can beget, for now she and he must also possess relative assurance that their would-be offspring will be genetically sound and healthy.

The mutual approximation and eventual confluence of the two great realms of civilization, the West and the East, in the prophetic age of a cultural synthesis between the Oriental wisdom of how to control one’s soul and body and the Occidental knowledge of how to subdue the world of subhuman nature, are to effect a change of attitude in Western man so that his idea of himself will be of a being for whom the

fate of the world is determined by his *own* fate and not *vice versa*. As to his own fate, Western man will know how to control it, he will discover, that is to say, a systematic path to self-redemption. At least this much can be gathered from the above four or so paragraphs wherein I have sketched possible cultural areas which, according to Scheler, may successfully incorporate the Asian notion of self-control.

I could, of course, be critical of many of the details presented in Scheler account. I could argue, for instance, that the West has had its own tradition of developing psychic techniques towards, say, the alleviation of pain and the ease of suffering. I could beckon at the technical ability of Stoics to enter permanent states of apathy or at the harsh asceticism of flesh and mind practiced the desert hermits of the Early Christian Church. I could call into question the thesis that Western man's spiritual orientation moves from matter to the soul. Recall Socrates, for whom 'care for the soul' ranked above all else (and this in a broader sense than just an ethical care); I could also recall St. Augustine, whose character as tendencies as a thinker, if anything, had the direction 'from the soul to matter,' not the opposite. Would not these examples suffice to stir up doubts?

Or consider the field of negative politics: Scheler himself mentions the Quakers who, according to him, held the 'teachings of non-rule and heroic nonresistance' "for centuries." So how is it that such teachings are to be the fruit of the new cultural synthesis? Also, Scheler's interpretation

of some problems concerning population control and qualitative eugenics I might challenge by turning attention to the fact that it is precisely the Asian continent and the peoples inhabiting it, adept as they may be in psychosomatic techniques of various sorts, that have serious problems with the surplus of child-births, nor are they particularly famed for the genetic quality of their offspring.

I could, furthermore, observe that even if social policies regarding the eugenic regulation of population-growth got implemented in the West, in itself that would be a very insignificant achievement, since the guarantee of a man's genetic perfection is no guarantee of his emotional, intellectual, and, in general, spiritual health and well-being. I could allow myself a sarcasm and note that Scheler himself did not earn recognition for his accomplishments in athletics or for any other endowment with 'special hereditary qualities,' yet he remains an epoch-making thinker. Which of the two, I may question, is more valuable and, in the long run, more influential, which of them has lasted even to this day, and which has vanished long ago?

I could voice all these objections and, possibly, many others, but I do not. And this for several reasons: One, Scheler's point is not so much that the practice of psycho-vital techniques and of methodic self-control has been entirely missing from the history of the West, but that the practice of some of them has indeed been either absent or too marginal. Two, even those techniques which on the surface seem to belong both to the East and to the

West may and often do vary in spirit and import. Though a Buddhist monk and a Christian mystic may both seek God by active and disciplined training of the soul, still the former's self-redemptive state of nirvana is worlds apart from the latter's self-submissive state of divine grace. Scheler's search is after "the other's new and 'alien' attitudes" which is, more often than not, a difference in aspect and not in kind. Three, the status of most of Scheler's observations is characterized by 'more or less true' or 'true for the most part.'

A CRITICAL NOTE: WHOSE LANGUAGE WILL THE EAST–WEST DIALOG ADOPT?

In the final analysis, Scheler, in my opinion, so far as his sociology of knowledge is concerned, has missed the importance of language. And that he has done so, I must confess, both disappoints and astounds me, for the man, who appeared to be all immersed in the visionary ideas of a new cosmopolitanism of cultural fields and a cultural synthesis between the Oriental and the Occidental systems of world-conceptions and -valuations, the man, who, in prophetic tone, invoked upon Schopenhauer's 'sublime and great discussion,' beyond time and space, that the "best representatives of the various cultural fields [would] lead on metaphysical subjects," this man seems to have forgotten that every one of these representatives must speak his *own* language and use a conceptual scheme attached to *that particular* language, it being an essential property of his cognition, so that to translate his language would

imply, in some respect, also *translating his metaphysics*.

"You desire to discover how the Chinese or the Hindus 'actually' think? First, learn the language, and only then attempt to converse with their best metaphysical representatives!" – this I would append as a directive to the Schelerian pursuit of a dialog between Western and Eastern metaphysical attitudes and thoughts.

And since a metaphysician's ability to *communicate* his intellectual vision of the ultimate universe is essentially related to his language, with all of its inherent stipulations as well as incentives suggesting this view of things and not another, disposing towards these distinctions, but not others, – since this is so, the Schelerian dialog is to prove a much more taxing and formidable task, one that cannot be reduced to just "reading more books." It is a task that involves the painful effort of mastering strange languages, living in strange environments and absorbing strange customs, mores, and comportments. Truly, Scheler has affirmed the relevance of most of these; he held, for instance, the technique of selfcontrol to be one of the preconditions for philosophical knowledge, a technique which he has appropriated from Buddhism. His fault, which I am stressing here, is that he left out of account the *significance of language*, and this he should not have omitted. It is my conviction that language deserves a special attention in the sociology of knowledge, and in the East–West discussion it even becomes a core issue.

Perhaps, another time, another place...

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