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THE AGING OF A CULTURE

abstract

The aim of this essay is to examine the parallel Scheler assumes between the individual person and collective person (or culture). I argue that Scheler's early and late analyses of the experience of aging and death inform his idea of history and what it means to be at the "end" of one's own history. An aging culture is one afforded with the opportunity to reckon with its past and take responsibility for its failures and prejudices.

keywords

Scheler, aging, death, culture, and history

Max Scheler shares in the assumption Plato established in his *Republic* that there is a parallel between the individual person and the polis. For Scheler, this parallel runs between the individual person and the collective person, or more precisely between the individual person and the collective person of a culture. Whereas for Plato, the parallel between was between the three parts of the soul and the three groups of individuals found in the polis, the parallel for Scheler consists in both the constitution of the individual person and culture as an act-center as well as the structure of the historical development over the course of the lifetime of the individual person and culture. This latter parallel becomes particularly prescient when at the end of his own life, Scheler takes up reflections on the coming of a new age, a new world age, that would mark the end of the western culture and possible dawn of a new culture and stage of history. As Scheler was reflecting on the meaning and structure of history in this later stage of his own writing, he was simultaneously revisiting his earlier reflections on aging and death. My intent in this paper is to make Scheler's parallel between the individual person and culture explicit in regards to their shared processes of aging and awareness of death. In other words, not only does a person age, but also a culture.

As I show, the awareness of one's death is grounded, for Scheler, in the awareness that one is aging. Following the parallel between the individual person and culture, this would also mean that a culture is also aware that it is aging and that its time is coming to an end. Such an awareness calls attention to the finitude of a culture and thus its limitations. In Scheler's reflections on the coming new world age, he describes it as a process of adjustment wherein limited perspectives or prejudicial worldviews are called into question and necessarily balanced to avoid unprecedented violence. Understanding the end of life as a process of aging allows for a different type of reflection regarding what it means to be at or near the end of one's own time and one's own culture. It is not a reflection of absolute knowing, as was the case for Hegel (Hegel 2011), or one of decline, as was the case of Spengler (Spengler 1926), but in which a culture collectively comes to terms with his limitations and prejudices, cultivating a sense of cultural humility rooted in a sense of personal and collective responsibility. The awareness of the aging of one's cultures offers a privileged and unique perspective on the ways in which individuals bear a shared sense of responsibility for the history of one's culture.

In his magnum opus, *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Values*, Scheler sought to address and correct two mistaken assumptions Kant had made in his ethics.¹

The first assumption concerned Kant's insistence that an ethical a priori had to be formal and thus purely rational in order to establish any objectivity in ethics. Scheler's response was to show that there is indeed a material a priori, an objective rank order of values given in experience. In Part II of his *Formalism*, Scheler focused on Kant's second mistaken assumption, which concerned Kant's notion of the person. Kant makes use of his notion of person in his second expression of the categorical imperative, namely that a person ought never be treated merely as a means, but always as an end. Scheler shares with Kant the idea that the person is of absolute value and consequently ought never be treated in a manner that would ever compromise this value (Scheler [1913]1980, 371; Scheler 1973, 372). Where Kant is mistaken, according to Scheler, is in how he defines the meaning of a person. For Kant, a person is a rational being or, as Scheler expresses it, "the person is the X of some kind of rational activity" (Scheler [1913] 1980, 370-371; Scheler 1973, 371). Such a definition of the person treats the person as a thing or substance that has particular qualities or powers, reducing the person to an object. For Scheler, the person is by contrast non-objectifiable, which means that the being or meaning of a person can never be fully captured or exhausted by some definition or set of essential qualities.

The central problem of any attempt to define the person by a set of qualities is that it treats the person as merely a member of a class of beings and fails to capture the absolute uniqueness of each and every person. Kant's treatment of the person is only one instance wherein the person has been depersonalized. As a means by which to remain true to the uniqueness of the person, Scheler defines the person as "co-experienced unity of experiencing" (Scheler [1913] 1980, 371; Scheler 1973, 371). While it is certainly the case that it is possible to describe qualities that all persons share, these qualities by no means define the meaning of any specific person. For instance, persons, for Scheler, execute intentional acts or, in other words, they are the subjective correlate of any intentional act. Yet, no one person executes an act in the same manner. As an "act center," the person is indeed given in each act and hence there is no person "behind" or outside of the execution of acts. However, no person is ever fully or exhaustively given in any particular act or sum of acts. In this sense, the person remains fully "transcendent" (Scheler [1913] 1980, 385; Scheler 1973, 385). Perhaps the best way to describe the person is as a particular style or personality, the unique way in which concrete acts are executed that can be grasped in any one or any set of acts.

Human beings are, for Scheler, finite persons, in contrast to infinite persons such as God. There are in principle many possible types of persons and even other types of embodied persons. In his *Formalism*, Scheler introduces a distinction between two types of persons, individual and collective persons. Both types of persons are act-centers (Scheler [1913]1980, 532; Scheler 1973, 545). What distinguishes the individual from the collective persons are the types of acts that constitute each. The being of an individual person is constituted by "singularizing acts," while the collective person is constituted by "social acts" (Scheler [1913] 1980, 511; Scheler 1973, 520).² Though constituted by different types of acts, the collective person is as singular as the individual person (Scheler [1913] 1980 514; Scheler 1973, 520). Here is not the place to develop either of Scheler's notions, individual and collective persons, at

1. Individual and Collective Persons

1 For a detailed account of Scheler's critique of Kant, see Phillip Blosser's *Scheler's Critique of Kant's Ethics*.

2 Scheler borrows the notion of the social act from Adolf Reinach and his work, *Die apriorischen Grundlagen des bürgerlichen Rechts*. I have developed Scheler's use of Reinach's notion of the social act in "The Act of Promising, an Act of Solidarity."

any great length.³ My interest is focused solely on how Scheler establishes a parallel between these two notions, with particular emphasis on how both notions assume a unique being and history. Also, for the purposes of this essay, I examine only one of the two kinds of collective persons. In *Formalism*, Scheler claims that there are two kinds of collective persons, culture and the church.⁴ These two collective persons, culture and the church, are constituted by social acts relative to the value modalities of spirit and the holy respectively. Since Scheler's treatment of history primarily concerns the growth of a culture, I only examine the parallel between the individual person and the collective person of culture.

Culture, for Scheler, is constituted by the distinctive spiritual ideals and values of a people that has given rise to their unique worldview. In other words, culture is the spiritual sense of history. Scheler is in agreement with Hegel and much of the idealist tradition that spirit enjoys its independence from the material or real factors and that its spontaneity and growth spring from spirit alone. However, Scheler does reject any suggestion that there is an idea or logic of history working itself out from beginning to end. He insists rather that the growth and movement of a culture is necessarily personal and thus unique. There are two factors that account for Scheler's personal account of history. The first concerns the fact that the sense of a culture lives in and is carried from generation to generation through the spiritual acts of the members of a culture. As Scheler writes, "the collective persons must be actively carried and newly executed through the spiritual cooperation of its members (Scheler 1993, 386). Hence, there is no idea that reveals itself at the end of history, but one that is present in every aspect of a culture such as its art, philosophy, science, law, economy, and state (Scheler 1963, 342). Because the members of a culture are themselves unique and execute acts in their own unique style, the course and growth of a culture is carried on in its own unique manner. If there had been other members of a culture, its course and style would have been otherwise. This belonging to a culture precedes any conscious awareness of it and is carried on through its members regardless of whether they are aware of their contribution to the course of its growth (Scheler [1913] 1980, 510; Scheler 1973, 520).

The second factor that contributes to the uniqueness of a culture is the original work of a culture's geniuses. Through the work of the genius an original way of understanding and valuing the world is introduced. Cultural growth and change are not the result of an idea working itself out in history, but the result of the novel ideas of the genius. Thus, it is the ideas of persons who chart the course of a culture and establish the unique "personality" of a particular culture. Writing in direct response to the growing political crisis in Weimar Germany and the rise of fascism across Western Europe, Scheler emphatically remarks: "Never and at no time in history that I am aware of has a genuine cultivation of the leading elite been more necessary and more difficult" (Scheler 1976, 109). Although Scheler recognizes the crucial and necessary role the real or material factors had in the efficacy of political ideals, he shares with the idealist tradition that the resource from which all meaningful change an revolution is spirit. "The sources of a new politics never flow from politics itself. The state neither finds the ideas nor produces them... This is the task of philosophy, of science, of art, and religion, in short, the task of the autonomous activities in the ideal region" (Scheler 1990, 54). Change and thus cultural growth develop from a direction of inspiration or as Scheler describes it, "from above to below." Throughout his life, he sought out new expressions of this

³ For such an account of Scheler's notion of collective person, see Manfred Frings' *The Mind of Max Scheler*, pp. 114-199, and Ernest Ranly's *Scheler's Phenomenology of Community*.

⁴ Scheler also describes the collective person of the church as the form of the love and holy community (Scheler 1954, 261).

inspiration, inspirations such as war and the Catholic Church, and was often disappointed. At the end of his life, Scheler turned to a convergence of the world's diverse cultures. Yet, regardless of the specific resource, the structure of change and the movement of history remains the same: "all history is essentially a work of the elite and their imitators" (Scheler 1976, 75).

It is only in this late work that Scheler makes use of the term "elite" in describing the persons that inspire historical change. For the majority of his writings, Scheler uses his notion of the genius or moral exemplar to describe such persons. The reasons for this change in terminology is not clear and a sudden change in terminology is not unprecedented in Scheler's work. The use of this term elite has led some commentators to accuse Scheler of being an elitist.⁵ Such an accusation fails to understand Scheler's use of the term in the context of his notion of exemplarity and further in the context of his writings on education at this time, writings that sought to create a deeper relation between the so-called technical schools and the universities.⁶ Scheler is an elitist in so far as it refers to the direction of influence of spirit on history and I mention it here at the outset of this section to avoid any further misunderstanding of the notion in Scheler's work.⁷

The changes that the elite or genius inspire does not take place through particular practical actions that they take, but through the way in which they transform a culture by disclosing new ideals and values. The objective correlate of a culture is the world or rather the sense of the world. (Scheler [1926] 1980, 25). A transformation of the ideals and values of a culture transforms the way in which the world is given. In this respect, a change in a culture is a change in its *Weltanschauung*, its worldview. The world of a particular culture is a microcosm of the world itself, the macrocosm. Every culture has its own world. This does not mean that there is a plurality of worlds. There is, for Scheler, only the one world. A worldview opens up access to a "partial" sense of the world and this mode of access is unique to a culture (Scheler 1954, 199). Each culture thus contributes to the disclosure of the sense of the world, but also, as Scheler suggests, has its limitations and virtues (Scheler 1963, 345). This is not to suggest that the world of a culture is somehow impoverished or incomplete. The world is given fully, yet never exhaustively. It also necessarily follows that a culture could never replace or overtake the world of another culture. The contribution that a culture makes to the sense of the world is both irreplaceable and unique (Scheler [1926] 1980, 154; Scheler 1954, 205). Since every worldview is a "partial" glimpse of the world and since there is no world without such a worldview, there is by definition a variety and diversity of cultures (Scheler [1926] 1980, 27), and with each great culture a unique history.

A worldview for Scheler is a "subjective a priori." Much like Kant's notion of the categories of the understanding, the worldview of a person structures experience according to pre-given essences and essential structures, structures that allow certain aspects of experience to come into the foreground of attention and other aspects to recede into the background (Scheler 1954, 208). Yet, in agreement with Hegel, Scheler rejects the ahistorical and universal nature of Kant's categories (Scheler 1976, 127). There are for Scheler no innate or inborn ideas (Scheler 1954, 1995). The subjective a priori develops historically over the life of a culture through a process he calls the functionalization of essences. "Every 'kind of thinking,' every kind of structured anticipatory schemata in which worldview forms and forms of science in general

5 For example, see John Raphael Staude, *Max Scheler 1874-1928: An Intellectual Portrait*.

6 Max Scheler, *Universitäten und Volkshochschule*, in *Die Wissenformen und die Gesellschaft*.

7 For a discussion of Scheler's notion of the "elite" and its relation to his notion of exemplarity, see Gabrielle Schneider, "'Vorbilder' in Max Schelers wertfundiertem Elitiekonzept."

present the essence of the world, has become through ‘functionalization’” (Scheler [1926] 1980, 198) Rather than account for the development of the categories of the understanding dialectically, Scheler accounts for the subjective a priori pragmatically, accounting for the way categories have developed through a practical interaction with the world.

In every experience, according to Scheler, there is an essential intuition or what Husserl in the *Logical Investigations* called a categorial intuition. This means, in respect to perceptual experience, that in addition to the sensible qualities given to the senses, there is a grasping of the object as an object, its essence or meaning. As such, there is a differentiation in every experience of what is and what is not essential to that object, a differentiation of what this object has in common with other like objects. This is, for Scheler, the function essences play in experience. “Functionalization is the process through which the experience of a certain object becomes after disregarding all non-essential qualities of the object of intuition (i.e., selection priority) from all other objects of the same essence” (Scheler 1987, 145). Rather than the fixed, universal categories, these functionalized essences are in a process of becoming more or less exact, more or less refined through continued experience and use in the world. Functionalized essences come to serve as a “law of mere use of the understanding” as it functions as a means to discriminate according to essential connections (Scheler 1954, 198). Through a process of trial and error, a process by which the person comes to gain more experience of the world in which she lives, these laws become the essential structure of knowledge itself (Scheler 1954, 203).

In his later writings, Scheler also describes this process of functionalization at work in all living beings. At the mere level of living being, there is not the functionalization of essences, but of “images.” All living beings, for Scheler, exhibit some form of practical intelligence through its continued interaction and maneuvering in its environment. Functionalization is the process by which living beings learn to inhabit and thrive in their environment. Regarding spiritual knowledge, it is the process wherein the knowledge of essences becomes a form of practical intelligence (Scheler 1987, 176). With this notion of functionalization, Scheler is attempting to provide a different account of evolution and adaptation. “Characteristics” are not inherited, but rather “functions” are inherited. These functions are what enable an organism to learn of its environment, to functionalize its experiences in order to better thrive. At the mere vital level of existence, there is no grasping of the world as such and mere living beings do not have a worldview. Non-spiritual, living beings live only in an environment and functionalization at this level is the process in which the environment comes to have a structure in which the organism can move (Scheler 1976, 33). The natural history of an organism is the course of development of its particular functions and how these functions have further adapted to its environment over time.

Spiritual beings, by contrast, have a cultural history, a history of the development of spirit. Through the functionalization of essences, spiritual beings acquire ways in which to think the world, acquire over time categories of the understanding, its objective spirit. A culture’s objective spirit is the sense-content that directs and is assumed in language, tools, rites, ceremonies, mores, i.e., those practices and activities that function as defining characteristics of that culture (Scheler 1980, 24). Through shared cultural practices, the functionalization of essences particular to that culture becomes sedimented, but never fixed. By its very nature, functionalization is a dynamic process that continues to change as seen in the transformation in language, arts, religious rites, and social norms. The “carrying over” of functionalized essence and thus a culture from one generation to the next takes place unconsciously through shared and vicarious feelings (Scheler 1987, 146).

The history of a culture is both the way in which functionalized essences and thus a worldview has been adopted over time, and also how new ways of grasping the world, novel

essential insights have fundamentally changed this worldview in the growth of a culture. It is with this question concerning the change to a worldview of a culture that we are able to clarify the structure of growth introduced at the beginning of this section with Scheler's notion of the elite. Scheler's notion of functionalization places the emphasis on the introduction of new essential insight. The logic of history is not an idea that works itself out through different epochs or *gestalts* of history, but a history of persons who have introduced through their own genius the new essential insights that set history on a different course. There is thus no necessity to the growth and development of history, for Scheler. At its roots, there is the contingency of those who have brought forth new ideas, ideas that have caught the attention of a people and subsequently changed the way in which the world is given. These persons are the geniuses in history.

Scheler's notion of the genius is developed within Scheler's theory of exemplarity.⁸ As Scheler asserts in *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Value*, "there is no ideal or value, no order or norm that was not first instituted originally by the personal example of the exemplar" (Scheler [1913] 1989, 560). Even though we are not introduced to the notion of exemplarity until the end of the Scheler's major work on ethics, it is with this notion that we find ourselves at the origin of Scheler's value personalism. The genius is the exemplar type that corresponds to the value of culture or spirit. All cultural values and ideals find their origin in the genius (Scheler [1913] 1980, 309). Borrowing much from Kant's notion of genius in the *Critique of Judgment*, the genius functions for Scheler as the original disclosure of a world, an original disclosure that follow no preceding example or rule (Scheler 1957, 288). Cultural growth happens through the introduction of this new world opened up by the work of the genius. This sense of growth is not modeled under an idea of progress in history, but rather is modeled under a sense of novelty, of the emergence of a world that could not have been predicted in advance.

All knowledge is rooted in a particular type of loving.⁹ The genius participates in purely spiritual sense of loving, namely, wonder (Scheler 1954, 134; Scheler 1963, 34). The feeling of wonder arises through the astonishment that there is a world. It does not spring from any particular practical problem but is directed at the world as such. Wonder is the love of essences, and it is through the new insights of the genius that a new world is opened (Scheler 1954, 67; Scheler 1963, 91). The work of the genius bears witness to a microcosm, a manner of understanding the world without exhausting its meaning (Scheler 1957, 291). This world that the genius opens up would not have been revealed otherwise. There are of course many geniuses throughout history whose work has gone unrecognized, who were born at the wrong time so to speak. The contingency in history lies in part in which works attract the attention of a people. It also lies, however, in the person of the genius without whom history would have had a different course. The functionalization of essences responsible for the construction of a worldview, of the categories by which the world is given, is the functionalization of essences the person of the genius has glimpsed and introduced into the world for the first time. Although a culture is passed on from generation to generation, it is fundamentally personal. The world that gives itself to a people, the sense-content that informs all cultural practices and activities is by virtue of a history of geniuses, persons who have revealed a new way of thinking what the world means.

⁸ Here is not the place to develop Scheler's notion of exemplarity, for it would take the investigation too far afield. For an account of Scheler's notion of the exemplar and how it is different from "the leader," see Manfred S. Frings, *The Mind of Max Scheler*, pp. 76-78.

⁹ See Scheler's "Liebe und Erkenntnis," ("Love and Knowledge"), in *GW VI*, pp. 77-98.

2. Time, Aging, and History

The account of the parallel between the individual and collective person has achieved two main ends. First, it has shown that both the individual and collective person are irreplaceable and have their own unique style or personality. Secondly, the meaning or distinctive sense of this personality undergoes genuine growth over the course of a person's and a culture's existence. What remains to be shown from this parallel is the common finitude of both the individual and collective person.

There are two themes that Scheler explores in his early work and then returns to again in his later work: death and history.¹⁰ Although Scheler makes no explicit connection between these two themes, there is a remarkable similarity regarding how he treats the death of an individual person and the history of a culture. In this section, I examine how the early treatment of death and history are similar, and in the next section how the later treatment of these two themes also bears a similarity. There are significant differences between these early and late treatments of both themes, differences that reflect changes regarding the nature of the person. Yet, what remains consistent throughout these early and late treatments of both death and history is their necessary relation to the process and structure of aging.

Central to both his early lectures on history and his early treatment of death is the experience of time and, in particular, the relation between the past and the future.¹¹ The analysis Scheler gives in "Death and Living-On" is regressive in nature wherein he continues to seek out an order of foundation. His initial question in this work concerns the origin of the historically prevalent belief in an afterlife or at least the continued existence of the spiritual person after the death of the body. Rather than commit himself to any metaphysical claims about the nature of spirit or life, he chooses to move along epistemological lines and raises the question regarding the certainty of one's death. His focus is thus not on the event of death, the meaning existential transition from existence to non-existence, but rather the awareness and knowledge that our life is coming to an end. Such an awareness is, for Scheler, rooted in a "peculiar consciousness" of the life process (Scheler 1957, 18). Death, in other words, is not an event external to life, but one that is inherent to the process of living. We are certain of our death because we are aware that we are alive.

According to Scheler, every living being has an inner consciousness of the process of life. This consciousness is rooted in the temporal structure of living or, in other words, the consciousness of being alive is a temporal consciousness. In a manner quite similar to Husserl's analysis of time-consciousness, Scheler describes every living moment as having a temporal structure wherein there is an immediate-being-present, an immediate-being-past, and an immediate-being-future (Scheler 1957, 18). It is for this reason that Scheler describes life as a process, a process that unfolds temporally and has a directionality moving from the past to the future. Persons are temporal beings and have an inner time-consciousness because they are embodied beings.

Yet, as embodied beings, the experience of time is not one of indefinite or infinite moving toward an endless future. For Scheler, there is a distinctive relationship between the immediate-being-past and the immediate-being-future. As the past grows, the future is reduced. Referencing Bergson, Scheler writes, "the past continues to always take a fiercer bite

¹⁰ Scheler's early treatment of death was published in the *Collected Works* under the title, "Death and Living-On" ("Tod und Fortleben"), work that Scheler began in 1911/1912. His earliest work on history, "Foundations of the Science of History" (*Grundlagen der Geschichts wissenschaft*), was written for a course in 1909 at the University of Munich. Scheler's later work on death, "Aging and Death" ("Altern und Tod"), stem from manuscripts prepared for lectures given in the 1923-1924 semester, while his later work on history are fragments and manuscripts written between 1921 and 1924, published in the *Collected Works*, Volume 13.

¹¹ For a fuller treatment of Scheler's notion of time, see Manfred S. Frings' *Life-Time* (2003).

out of the future” (Scheler 1957, 19). It is not clear how Scheler has reached this conclusion as to why the past comes at a cost to the future other than observing how the relation to the future changes through the different stages of life.

For example, he writes:

For those in adolescence, their experienced future stands there as a broad, bright, far ranging, brilliant corridor, an immense playroom in the form of experience ‘can experience,’ painted in the wish, longing, fantasy of the thousand forms (Scheler 1957, 20).

The suggestion is that as a person matures their relation to future possibilities changes. It is not the case that the past determines what the future may be in terms of possibilities. Rather it means that the awareness of one’s time running out becomes more poignant as one’s past grows. A person can certainly choose to live a much different future than what had come before, but that there are a finite number of possibilities remaining becomes ever more present. It is precisely this experience of the future diminishing in possibilities as one’s past grows that is the experience of aging.

In addition to Bergson, other thinkers such as Simone de Beauvoir have also described aging as an experience of the past becoming an ever-greater burden on the future. She writes:

For human reality, existence means existing in time: in the present we look towards the future by means of plans that go beyond our past, in which our activities fall lifeless, frozen, and loaded with passive demands. Age changes our relationship with time: as the years go by our future shortens, while our past grows heavier (de Beauvoir 1972, 361).

Yet, what is distinctive about Scheler’s approach to the experience and awareness of aging is that it rests on an immediate inner intuition. The certainty of aging cannot be gained, for Scheler, through either inductive or dialectical reasoning. Even if we had never witnessed a person aging or even perceived signs of our own aging, we would, according to Scheler, be certain that we are getting older and that our time is running out (Scheler 1957, 22). As I discuss in the next section, Scheler’s later treatment of aging pays much more attention to the physical signs of aging and, in particular, to the diminishment of the “energy” of the life drives. However, Scheler remains consistent in the fact that the awareness of aging is internal and does not rest on any external signs of aging. In this early treatment, the awareness of aging springs from the inner contestation with time itself and it is this awareness that grounds one’s certainty of one’s coming death.

Scheler’s primary focus in this early treatment of aging is the life process of the individual person and at no time does he turn his attention to what these reflections would mean for the collective person. However, his early treatment of history, which he wrote prior to his analysis of aging, assumes the same temporal structure and burdening relation the past has to the future. This temporal structure is shown by how the past of a culture lives in and remains tied to its present.

In order to clarify the relation the historical past has to a culture’s present and future horizons, Scheler makes a distinction between the manner in which natural science and historical science understand the meaning of the past (Scheler 1990, 173). For the natural scientist, history is a series of events viewed chronologically in order to grasp the general character and laws that help explain why events unfolded in the manner that they did. Not only do these natural laws account for the course of evolution, they also can be used to control

and manipulate more effectively its future course to avoid further suffering and catastrophe. The meaning of these historical events is “dead,” and it is merely a matter of mining the artefacts and recording what has taken place. Historical science takes an idiographic approach to history and regards historical events as concrete individuals rather than in terms of natural laws of development (Scheler 1990, 170). “The primary aim of historical science,” writes Scheler, “is to bring to intuition and understanding the particular sense-content of past events” (Scheler 1990, 172).

Rather than treat the sense-content of past events as fixed in meaning or dead, the historical scientist treats historical phenomenon as a distinctive type of phenomenon (Scheler 1990, 187). Stated phenomenologically, the question becomes what it means for an event to be given as historical. “The *essence* of all history exists in not merely that some B follows some A like one movement follows a different movement, but that B is *experienced* as following A” (Scheler 1990, 180, emphasis in original). For an event to be given as historical, it must continue to have an effective relationship to the present. This does not mean that the historical scientist understands the meaning of the past in light of the present. This would be a case of anachronism. It is also not the case of attempting to time travel back to the event to witness how things really took place. For a phenomenon to be given as historical, its meaning bears a relation to the present and remains unfinished.

These reflections on the way in which a phenomenon is given as historical allow Scheler to make a further distinction between natural science and historical science, a distinction concerning their respective treatments of time. “The time of the natural scientist is a continuum of now-points or now-phenomena whose content we ignore” (Scheler 1990, 191). Time, for the historical scientist, has a much different structure. As Scheler had described the structure of time in his early writing on aging, the present for the historical scientist is not some point on a timeline, but a unified whole composed of the past, immediate present, and future horizons. Regardless of whether a person is consciously aware of it, the past persists and thus still lives in the present (Scheler 1990, 188). Here Scheler draws an analogy between how an individual brings events in one’s memory to intuition and how the historical scientist attempts to bring the sense-content of the past to intuition (Scheler 1990, 180). In his analysis of memory, Scheler makes a distinction between the immediate past and sedimented past. The immediate past is what one still consciously retains in the present moment, while sedimented past is that which recedes into the deeper recesses of one’s memory. Nonetheless, this sedimented past still “exists” and remains bound to the present. “Nothing,” writes Scheler, “is lost” (Scheler 1990, 197). The living connection one’s sedimented has to the present is found in how the past informs one’s style of being. What changes is the “weight” of the past (Scheler, 1990, 193). At any specific moment in one’s life, some of the events one’s past will be more readily present than others.

By regarding the past as having a living relation to the present, the “past” for the historian has an “existential dimension” fully unknown to the natural scientist, a dimension that reveals how the past of a people or culture remains in present and future generations (Scheler 1990, 191). As an individual’s past is retained in memory, “from the outset the entire history of a people continues to live in its current present: this history is not past like a natural event but is in the depths as effectively present” (Scheler 1990, 194). The way in which the past remains present is through the traditions passed from generation to generation. “Through tradition, the generations-epochs are connected into a living continuity, which is entirely independent of the conscious memory of it. Hence, in us lives Greek thinking and feeling, Christian living, entirely independent of what we know of this history and judge about it. At no time could we say: what would we be, if this or that piece was cut out of the past. Thus, never is a part of the past exhausted of its effectiveness” (Scheler 1990, 193-194).

While Scheler does make use of many parallels between the individual person and the collective person of culture in respect to memory and history, there is not explicit parallel drawn between the experience of aging in the individual and the possible aging of a culture. Given the close proximity this early work on history and his early work on aging have in respect to the treatment of time and the way in which the past is retained over the course of both an individual's life and the history of a culture, it is difficult to resist rereading Scheler's early work on history through the lens of the experience of aging. There is certainly a cultural awareness of older and newer traditions. Yet, does the growing history of a culture take a bite, to return to Bergson's phrase, out of a culture's future? Is there an awareness that the time of a culture will eventually run out? Cultures certainly do die, either through natural or human devastation. But do cultures have a natural death and is there an immediate consciousness of this finitude by the people belonging to a culture? Given the considerable difference in the lifespan of an individual person and that of a culture, the awareness of time running out may be considerably different for the individual and collective person. This lack of a clear connection between getting older and death indicates the limitations of a purely temporal and immanent account of aging and awareness of death. Nonetheless, there does seem to be a keen awareness that one is living in an "old" culture or a culture with long and rich traditions. As I show shortly in the next section, Scheler speaks directly of both the end of a culture and the possible emergence of a new one. From these early treatments of aging and history, we may not be able to speak of the end of history or the death of a collective person, but we are at least able to speak of an aging culture. Such a notion opens up a field of phenomenological investigation into the experiences related to living and being a member of a culture that is aging and possibly make sense the differences in experience amongst different generations of a people and their relation to the same culture but of a different age.

Both of Scheler's later treatment of aging and history are developed within a significant shift in Scheler's thought as a whole. In his later work, Scheler commits himself to the position that spirit bears no trace of power or effectiveness (Scheler 1980, 21).¹² The commitment to an impotent spirit complicates, in many respects, the account given above concerning Scheler's notion of culture and its growth. What this account of culture had taken for granted, at least through the lens of Scheler's later thought, are the material conditions or what he calls real factors that have allowed some ideas of the genius to have an effective force in the growth and history of a culture. As he notes in this later work, "Everything that happens takes place in the historical interplay of ideas and the power drives simultaneously" (Scheler 1990, 80).¹³ Much of Scheler's attention in his later work is dedicated to understanding and describing this interplay between the ideal and real factors, between spirit and life. A consequence of such attention is greater interest in the meaning and structure of life itself. This deeper interest in the course of life not only impacts Scheler's understanding of history, but also the process of aging and death. The result of these later investigation is a more explicit recognition that the collective person of culture ages in the same manner and stages as the individual person.

The notions of the real and ideal factors are first introduced in Scheler's relatively late work, *The Problems of a Sociology of Knowledge*. With this work, Scheler had sought to provide

3. Aging as the Structure of History

12 There are significant questions and deep-seated problems that immediately arise regarding Scheler's later work when he commits himself to a powerless spirit. I do not wish to address them here. For a discussion of these problems and different approaches to resolve them, see Zachary Davis (2010), "Scheler and the Task of Human Loving."

13 Scheler does hint at such a relation between the real and ideal factors in his earlier lectures on history. For instance, he writes if spirit alone was responsible for the course of history would mean that Rafael could paint without hands or that the genius is possible without means of education (Scheler 1990, 229).

a means by which to account for the way in which certain ideals and values have come to direct the course of a culture. That a culture has both real and ideal factors assumes the parallel developed above between the individual and collective person. As there are three basic life-drives in the individual, there are three basic real factors permeating a culture. The three life-drives of the individual person are the appetitive or accumulation drive, the power drive, and the reproductive drive (Scheler 1980, 101). These life drives correspond to three social institutions, the economic, political, and family respectively (Scheler 1980, 19). Each of these life-drives of the individual as well as the real factors of a culture are different express what Scheler calls *Alleben* or *urge* (*Drang*).¹⁴ While spirit and life ultimately form a functional unity, they both enjoy their independent structure and course of movement. Spirit is directed toward ever-deeper personal values, life is structured according to the aim of the maximization of reality (*Realen*) and a minimization of strenuous energy output (Scheler 1979, 186). In respect to being, there is never a time other than this striving to be. "Urge, the urge toward existence is nothing more than existence" (Scheler 1979, 161).

The notion of the life-drives comes to serve a central role in Scheler's later treatment of both aging and death. As shown above, Scheler's early treatment of aging was rendered purely in terms of the experience of time itself or more specifically in terms of the burden the past comes to have on future possibilities. In his later treatment, the experience of aging is described not in terms of time running out, but in terms of a steady decrease in the energy of the life-drives (Scheler 1987, 318). Aging becomes, in other words, not a temporal experience, but a biological one. Scheler's general approach to aging and death had not changed. Death was not to be regarded as the opposite of death or something that happens to life from without. Life and death are of the same process (Scheler 1990, 259). This is how Scheler understood the idea of a natural death. There are of course many external events that may end a person's life, cutting it tragically short of its natural death. Yet, that a living-being has a natural death is assumed in the life process itself. For this reason, Scheler argues that there is no mere empirical "leap" between life and death (Scheler 1990, 266). It is one and the same biological process.

Rather than describe death as an event that marks the decisive transition of being to not-being, Scheler describes dying as a "dynamic movement" (Scheler 1990, 280). He demonstrates this point through the difficulty in locating the time of one's death. There is clearly a moment when one is living and when one is dead. However, exactly when or at which point this happened. Is it when the heart stopped beating? Or when the brain lost all function? Death is not an event, but a process wherein the life-drives are exhausted of their energy. The "cause" of death is thus no different from the cause of aging (Scheler 1990, 279). As Scheler had established in his earlier writings on death and aging, the knowledge of one's death, of one's finitude, is rooted in the experience of aging. Yet, in the later writings, the experience of aging is the lived experience of a diminishment in energy, a diminishment that foretells of ultimately coming to an end. The energy of the life-drives is no longer experienced, as perhaps it is in youth, as inexhaustible.

Much of Scheler's reflections on aging and death are developed in these later works in dialogue with the scientific community. For instance, he raises questions concerning the natural pigmentation of the cells and why at some point cells stop regenerating and start degenerate. He even raises the question as to whether there is in the process of life itself a

¹⁴ The notion of life and urge are introduced in Scheler's later work. For the sake of simplicity, I will use the term life to refer to the basic impulse of life. For a fuller and rich discussion of this notion, see Angelina Sander, "Askese und Weltbejahung: Zum Problem des Dualismus in der Anthropologie und Metaphysik Max Scheler."

type of self-poisoning (Scheler 1990, 282). These investigations into the biology of life suggest that aging and death cannot be located in changes to the living process, but are internal to the process itself. Living becomes a process of aging and dying. The life-time of a person could be described in terms of the ebb and flow of the energy of the life-drives, especially for Scheler in terms of the reproductive or sex-drive. In adolescence, there a feeling of a steady increase in life energy, reaching a type of pinnacle in adulthood, and then a steady loss of energy as one reaches “old-age.” It is important to note that Scheler never speaks of the end of one’s life as a decline in value. The spirit of a person does not age (Scheler 1987, 325). As we learn from Cephalus in Plato’s *Apology*, a loss of sexual energy can be experienced as an opportunity to spend more of one’s time on other matters. Aging does not make life less valuable. It may only change what types of activities are of value or deserving of our attention.

These later manuscripts on aging and death help clarify why Scheler assumes that history unfolds in “an essential order of the phases of time” (Scheler 1990, 138). History is, for Scheler, nothing other than the spiritualization of life (Scheler 1990, 144). This process of spiritualization takes place through the interplay of spirit and life. Spirit is the determining factor in history, determining the expression of life in terms of value and ideas, a *liberté modifiable*. By contrast, the real factors are the *fatalité modifiable*, allowing as sluice gates certain values and ideas to be realized (Scheler 1980, 23). What mediates the relation between the ideal and real factors, and thus what determines which spiritual ideals and values come to direct the institutions of a culture, is the will of persons (Scheler 1980, 40; Scheler 1990, 142-143). Yet, the course of history and the will of the people are not alone in determining the course of history. Also at play is the biological course of life. As the individual finite person moves through distinct stages in life, so too does a culture. According to Scheler, there are three main phases of a culture: a youthful stage, a blossoming stage, and a maturing phase (Scheler 1980, 41). The phases of life are of the same structure for both the individual and collective person.

In respect to the aging of a culture, the determining factor for the different stages concerns the dominance of one of the life-drives over the other. In the earliest phase of a culture, we find the predominance of the reproductive drive, which then sees in its blossoming stage the rise of the power drive, and finally the rise of the accumulation drive. For Scheler, proof of such stages of development can be shown in the present rise of late capitalism and the emergence of a world economy. The three different phases in the aging of a culture are not a mere happenstance of one life drive moving to prominence over the other two. There is a lawful directedness to the spiritualization of power. Each phase of history, with its rise of one life-drive over the other, can also be understood as a particular expression of power. The predominance of the reproductive drive is expressed as the “power of human beings.” As a culture grows and ages, power undergoes a form of spiritualization. In the maturation stage of a culture, the political and “blossoming” stage of a culture, power is expressed as the power over both humans and things. The later stage of a culture, the economic phase, power is expressed only in terms of the power over things, signaling greater technology and industrialization. According to Scheler, there is a unique trajectory and curve following the lawfulness of the spiritualization of power. It is the general tendency of the transformation of violence into political power, of the right of power into the power of right, of physical power to spiritual power (Scheler 1990, 93-94). Scheler is well aware that this developmental curve of history that follows the arc of the spiritualization of power is not a linear progression of decreasing violence. He repeatedly warns of the possibility of a second world war and unimaginable violence in the near future (Scheler 1976, 153). Where Germany and Europe in 1926 stood on this curve toward non-violence was yet to be seen (Scheler 1990, 94). The Great

War had shown that the European culture may not live to experience its natural death and could use its own technological powers to destroy itself.

4. An Aging Culture

Scheler had only described three stages of the individual life and three stages of the life of a culture. Since Europe is living in the third stage and apparently at the end of its cultural life, there is at least one obvious question that remains: Is there a fourth stage or are we at the end of western history?¹⁵ As I have noted above, the leading question to Scheler's early treatment of death concerned the reason why the belief in "living-on" after death was so prevalent amongst almost all cultures. Scheler argued that what is also given in the experience of aging and death is the "Überschuss" or surplus of spirit over life (Scheler 1957, 47). In his later speculations on history, Scheler appears to be very much in the midst of such an experience of the surplus of the western spiritual culture over its living history. He speaks for example of a fourth stage, which he calls a noetic stage (Scheler 1990, 138), and describes this stage as the moment when spirit has moved from the selected to the selecting (Scheler 1990, 145), which would appear to describe a new sense of freedom. Composing these notes on history at the end of his life, it comes perhaps at no surprise why Scheler may be moved to speculate on the next stage of not only western history, but his own history.

As there is this speculative look forward at this late stage in the history of the west, there is also in Scheler a look back over the course of western history. He describes this late stage of western history as the world-age of balancing (*Ausgleich*). It is in this world-age that there is a necessary relaxation of tensions between cultural conflicts, conflicts such as those arising from the confrontation of the east and west (Scheler 1976, 153). While there are certainly material conditions which are necessary to allow such a world-age to emerge, it is also a stage in history when a culture looks back upon itself and must reckon with its past. The individual and collective person are both irreplaceable and thus unique. An aspect of this uniqueness is the particular course a person's life has taken and the particular course of history that a culture has taken. This course is determined by the "partial" insights into the meaning of the world, those profound insights of the genius. Yet, this also means every culture is "one-sided." In addition to the conflict between world cultures, Scheler also speaks of the conflict between genders, class, and race. In this respect, the world-age of balancing is understood as a reckoning with one's cultural failures and prejudices, and an opportunity to take responsibility for them. Such a perspective one's life and cultural history is only possible when there is the awareness of having lived a life-time, an awareness of one's age.

Oswald Spengler had also described the growth of a culture as having the structure of aging. He writes:

We know it to the true of every organism that the rhythm of, form, and duration of its life, and all the expression-details of the life as well, are determined by the properties of its species. 'Mankind,' however, has no aim, no idea, no plan, any more than the family of butterflies or orchids. 'Mankind' is a biological expression, or an empty world. But conjure away the phantom, break the magic circle, and at once there emerges an astonishing wealth of actual forms – the living with all its immense fullness, depth and movement – hitherto veiled by a catchword, a dry as dust scheme, and a set of person 'ideals.' I see, in place of that empty figment of one linear history which can only be kept up by shutting one's eyes to the overwhelming multitude of facts, the drama of a

15 For an analysis of how Scheler's thought of the end of history differs from idealists such as Hegel, see Zachary Davis (2021), "Max Scheler's Idea of History: A Juxtaposition of Phenomenology and Idealism."

number of mighty cultures, each springing with primitive strength from the soil of a mother-region to which it remains firmly bound throughout its whole life-cycle; each stamping its material, its mankind, in its own image; each having its own idea, its own passions, its own life, will and feeling, its own death. (Spengler 1926, 21).

The biological nature of culture meant, for Spengler, that there was no higher “aim” or purpose of humanity than living out its life. Scheler reaches a much different conclusion and understands the process of aging to have a much different meaning. Living at the end of one’s time and one’s cultural history enables a person and possibly a people to take responsibility for who and what they have become. It is for this reason that Scheler declares that there is indeed an “aim” of history. It is nothing other than the “creation of history” (Scheler 1990, 139). Such an aim or purpose is not found at the beginning, but discovered with age.

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