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Max Scheler's *Problems of a Sociology of Knowledge* explores, in part, the relationship between theoretical thinking and what are usually thought of as being practical applications of theoretical thinking. It purports to establish a directly causal relationship between what might be called the life-interests of man and the theoretical thinking he engages in. The latter, according to Scheler, is not a product of pure contemplation, but rather a manifestation of elementary drives to acquire mastery over nature. It is this idea that this paper will endeavor to explicate and assess.

Early on in *Problems of a Sociology of Knowledge*, Scheler asserts that mind by itself cannot produce cultural achievements and cannot effect changes in culture and in history, because it lacks the necessary "power" to do so. Mind, according to Scheler, may be what he calls a "determining factor" in cultural developments, but it is not a "realizing factor" whereby cultural achievements are actually produced. To the extent that a mind is purer, more abstract, more contemplative, or more theoretical in nature, the less effect it will have upon society. Only those ideas which, in Scheler's words, "...are united with interests, drives, and collective drives or 'tendencies'" have the

necessary power and potential of actually being realized, and even then, only indirectly so.¹

Scheler proposes to reverse one's understanding of what the relationship between theoretical thinking and practical applications consists in. Theoretical thinking, according to Scheler, does not provide the foundations for practical activity; rather, it is man's concern with practical activities that determines the nature of theoretical thinking. The following passage illustrates Scheler's position:

...technology is not a subsequent "application" of a theoretical, contemplative science characterized by the idea of truth, observation, conservation, pure logic, and mathematics; rather, the more or less prevailing *will to control* and direct this or that realm of existence (gods, souls, society, organic and inorganic nature) co-determines the methods of thought and intuition, as well as the goals of scientific thought, and, indeed, it codetermines as though behind the back of the consciousness of individuals, whose changing motivations, for investigations do not matter in this process.²

The roots of this notion may perhaps be

traced to Nietzsche's conception of the will to power, or even perhaps to Schopenhauer's image of will, and not intellect, as the driving force behind the world. Scheler, however, casts his conception of the "will to control" in less metaphysical terms, and attempts to find support for his theory in history. It should be noted from the start, however, that Scheler does not hold, with Marx for example, the additional metaphysical claim that *all* intellectual activities are conditioned by one's vital interests—in Marx's conception, by the vital interests of economics. Curiously enough, Scheler holds this to be true only of positive science, and only true in light of what Scheler sees as science's inescapable link with technology. Furthermore, Scheler distinguishes between philosophy, on the one hand, which he claims is not inclined towards technical goals, and positive science on the other, which he claims *is* inclined towards technical goals, but not towards the goal of making knowledge itself the object of its investigations.³ What makes this position curious and, it might be added, also suspicious, is that, like philosophy, science itself can assume the form of an intellectual discipline which also makes the acquisition of knowledge without consideration for its practical benefits the object of its investigations. Need the link between science and technology be any firmer than the link between philosophy as an academic discipline and philosophy as a "way of life," or the link between art as a mode of expression and art as a form of decoration? The implications of these questions require further exploration.

First, however, it should be noted that Scheler held a pluralistic, rather than a monistic view of knowledge, and the distinctions made above should be seen in the context of a larger typology of the kinds of knowledge Scheler enumerated. All types of knowl-

edge are not on "equal par" with one another, but each has its own scope of inquiry and intent. Scheler distinguished between seven fundamental types of knowledge, and relegated each type to a position on a hierarchy arranged on a scale from the least "artificial" to the most "artificial."⁴ The seven types are :

1. myth and legend
2. knowledge implicit in everyday natural language
3. religious knowledge
4. mystical knowledge
5. philosophic-metaphysical knowledge
6. positive knowledge (viz., of mathematics, the natural sciences and the humanities)
7. technological knowledge

In arranging these types of knowledge according to their "artificiality," Scheler intended to show that the knowledge of myth and the knowledge implied in natural language, for example, are more basic and more easily acquired by humanity in general than are the more decidedly intellectual types of, say, philosophic-metaphysical knowledge or positive knowledge. The latter require more effort to cultivate, and hence, the ones attempting to acquire it are more conscious or aware of the elements which go into its cultivation. As a consequence, those types of knowledge which possess the most "artificiality" require and precipitate an element of control on the part of the investigators. To give an example: When a scientist converses with his family or acquaintances, he uses what Scheler calls natural language to do so. This language was learned from his culture and is shared by his family and acquaintances. It is a given, relatively unquestioned, precondition for communication of this sort.

When the same scientist attempts to record the results of his experiments, however, he requires and may even himself invent a technical, specialized vocabulary to express his findings. This latter activity requires a more conscious deliberation on the part of the scientist, and is more subject to his control. Furthermore, the specialized terminology he uses is open to critical examination in a way that the everyday language he uses is not.

Although Scheler arranges the types of knowledge hierarchically, he does not, in a manner similar to Comte, hold that the more "artificial" types historically evolve out of the less "artificial" types. All types of knowledge can coexist within a given society and historical frame of reference. Moreover, each individual person may engage in acquiring each of the various types of knowledge at different periods in time. In addition to thinking in a scientific mode of thought, a scientist may also contemplate philosophy, have religious sentiments, etc. Scheler did, however, give an historical account of the social conditions which aided in furthering the development of scientific thinking. In the course of examining Scheler's analysis of these conditions, some light might also be shed on his view of the relationship between science and technology.

The reformation did not exert as much of an influence on the development of science as might be thought, according to Scheler. The Reformation did, however, have the effect of bringing about a collapse of the domination of the ecclesiastical hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church. The hierarchy itself, of course, remained intact, but it became easier for individuals to stand outside of that hierarchy. With the partial disintegration of the Church's authority, certain checks on an individual's thinking, say, on scientific matters, could either be minimized

or entirely eliminated by one occupying a position outside of the Church. From the standpoint of the Church or from the standpoint of the Reformers, however, absolute freedom regarding scientific matters was far from being automatically insured; each group remained suspicious of forms of knowledge which had the potential of coming into conflict with religious dogma. But once the Reformers had "broken the spell" of the Church's authority in intellectual matters, it became easier for free inquiry to be engaged in. But the Reformers themselves, Scheler asserts, were in some ways more hostile to the development of free inquiry. "The prevailing ecclesiastical powers," Scheler notes, referring to the powers of the Roman Catholic Church, "had been more enlightened and more friendly towards science, more circumspect, and, above all, more rational than the great reformers, who were characterized by a gloomy fanaticism, irrationalism, and, in general, indifference to culture."³ The Reformation itself, as a new way of thinking about religious matters, did nothing to further the advancement of science.

But there are, according to Scheler, several important similarities between the intellectual presuppositions of the Reformation and those of the developing science. Each had a tendency towards nominalism, in contrast to the realism of the medieval period, and each amplified the role of "will," in contrast to purely contemplative thinking, as a dominating factor in man's nature. A tendency to acquire certitude independently of authority by, in the case of the Reformers, emphasizing the personal decision involved in salvation, and by, in the case of science, emphasizing the role of direct observation, was a characteristic also held in common by both. Furthermore, the Reformers, to ac-

quire independence from the Church's authority, were not as apt as the latter to identify the existing social order with that ordained by God; i. e., Christianity stood above culture and the world, and not within it. The dualism advocated by the Reformers not only had the effect of further breaking the Church's near monopoly on political power, but it also had the effect of defining the proper spheres of theology and science; if theology treated only of things transcendent, science could freely treat of things immanent in the world. Theology and science became relatively autonomous disciplines, both free to pursue their investigations within their appropriate spheres of inquiry.

In addition to these historical, and more or less institutional, factors concerning the relationship between ecclesiastical authority and scientific inquiry, Scheler also spoke of several factors which are not specifically institutional, but which are nonetheless preconditions for the development of science in any age. One of these preconditions is, in Scheler's words, "...the priority of 'those with a sense of appreciation over those with mere expertise'"—what he also refers to as "...the priority of 'love over knowledge.'"⁶ The phrase "love over knowledge" seems an unusual, even perhaps unfortunate, choice of words, partly because of the ambiguities of the word "love," and partly because the phrase seems to imply an emphasis on irrationality over rationality. The term "appreciation" conveys Scheler's meaning somewhat better, but only if it is understood as a word whose meaning touches upon those non-rational (and not *irrational*) elements which are present in a culture and which help to arouse a scientist's curiosity about his work.

Scheler notes,

Throughout its history, any new area that science has subjugated for itself must have been grasped first through an emphasis upon *love*—only then can an age of more sober and more intellectually objective investigation emerge. Hence a new natural *science* presupposes also a new natural *feeling*: a new valuation of nature.⁷

This new appreciation for nature originated, Scheler observes, during the Renaissance, and developed through the Romantic period and beyond. Such an appreciation of nature was almost totally absent during the medieval period, but its presence in subsequent periods aided in furthering the development of science. It is a mistake, however, Scheler concludes, to think that it was the rational thought of science which overcame what he calls the "anthropomorphism of the medieval world-view."⁸ The Scholastics, Scheler notes, had more acumen in engaging in subtleties of thought. Hence, it was not more thinking or better thinking than that of the Middle Ages which propelled science, but rather the direction the new scientists turned their mental powers towards. And this was preceded, in Scheler's estimation, by the expressly non-rational feeling of a new empathy between man and nature.

Scheler writes,

What led beyond book knowledge and narrow anthropomorphism was...an orgasmic and ecstatic *emotional devotion to nature* and a new attitude that opened up the world; in it was sensed, through one's own drive-life, a continuation of the vital powers and currents bearing all nature.⁹

Despite the use of such strong terms as “orgiastic” and “ecstatic,” Scheler’s account of this precondition for the development of science seems to have a certain amount of plausibility, given the historical evidence he cites that the naturalism of the Renaissance and the blossoming of early science seemed to develop concurrently. What is somewhat doubtful, however, is the premise that one could establish, on the basis of this evidence, a causal relationship between “devotion to nature” and a devotion to scientific research. Recording a correlation between the two may be the best that can be hoped for. Yet, even if the benefit of the doubt is granted Scheler on this issue, his notion that a “will to control” is also a precondition for science’s development is somewhat more tenuous. It is upon this idea that Scheler bases his claim that theoretical thinking is dependent upon the practical benefits one hopes to obtain from that thinking.

It is only a short step to redefine in terms of “interest,” the concepts “love” and “appreciation,” as used in the previously-mentioned phrases. While these latter terms may be useful in describing the attraction of a scientist to his subject matter or his curiosity about nature, they further connote, Scheler seems to think, the idea that this curiosity arises from an interest in the practical results that will accrue from scientific investigations. It is one thing, for example, to express an appreciation for a tree, as an artist might, and quite another to look at the tree from the perspective of having an interest in it, as a logger might have an interest in it. Yet, for Scheler, the two approaches to the tree are interrelated. Even the artist, it might be argued, has a “practical” interest in the tree, since it is for him an object of aesthetic beauty and such ob-

jects are necessary for his craft.

If, then, men develop an appreciation for various objects, and see in them the potential of furthering their interests, a means must be found for controlling the objects, so that the desired benefits can be obtained. This is the essence of Scheler’s concept of science as a manifestation of the will to control. Scheler is quick to point out, however, that he does not mean by a “will to control” a tendency on the part of individual researchers to further their own *self*-interests. Rather, he sees the will to control as a collective, social phenomenon which transcends the individual and which also conditions the way men think about nature.

He writes,

One must not confuse all this with *motivations* or subjective intentions of learned *individuals* who do research; such motivations can be infinitely many: technical tasks, vanity, ambition, greed, love of truth, etc. What we declare is 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”...are effective beyond the will, wishes, and subjective intentions of individuals.¹⁰

Anyone who adopts such a view must also draw the conclusion that it is impossible to acquire true knowledge about the world that is not “tainted” by non-rational factors. If it is held that men engage in research for the sole purpose of gaining technological benefits, this factor will affect any conclusions they draw from their work. The knowledge gained is a relative, rather than an absolute one, according to such a view. The best that can be said is that if technological ap-

plications of scientific theories “work,” the theories on which they are based must be valid. The epistemological foundation for such a view is conventionalism, whereby scientific theories are seen as merely being convenient arrangements of the facts gained through research. The “truth” of competing theories is ascertained by assessing which theory is more “convenient,” i. e., by assessing which theory better accounts for facts and which will ultimately prove superior in technological applications of the theory. While Scheler does not openly endorse conventionalism, his own thinking seems to be influenced by it to a great extent. What he does say about conventionalism, however, is that while he believes it to have been proved in its essential points, he does not believe that it has any significance as such for the acquisition of knowledge.¹¹ Once a theory has been set forth, its adequacy can be refined and improved upon. No theory is immune from being revised, but one can hope that through such revisions a more adequate theory can be obtained in light of further investigations.

What is objectionable in this position is the notion that the effectiveness of technological applications of a theory becomes the criterion of scientific truth. While it may be true that a machine, for example, will not “work” if the scientific theories upon which it is based are false, it is not necessarily the case that the production of “workable” machines can become the test of a theory’s validity. Scheler seemed to ignore the fact that much scientific research does not aim at technological advances, but rather at simply ascertaining true knowledge about the world. Theories are not always constructed with a view towards technological applications, and even when they are, they must be constructed in light of the evidence that

is presented by the data which is experimentally uncovered.

Scheler’s position seems to break open at this point. If it is the case—as in most cases it seems to be—that scientific theories are the products of such activities as ascertaining the facts through experimentation, examining the evidence obtained, and drawing inferences based upon this evidence, then the question of whether or not a scientific theory can have technological applications is quite beside the point. If there are technological applications of a theory, it must be the theory that determines what technological applications, are possible and not the other way around, as Scheler supposed. What lends a certain amount of plausibility to Scheler’s position is the fact that in some cases a researcher does attempt to solve a technological problem. In the course of trying to solve this problem, he may engage in various experiments and test various theories to see which will be useful to him in solving it. But the actual activities of experimentation and theory-testing are separate activities from the activity of attempting to solve a technological problem. It was Scheler’s inability to distinguish between these two types of activities that led him to conclude that scientific activity was in all cases dependent upon technological interests.

One would expect that those societies which possessed the most impetus for technological advancement would be those societies which also supported the greatest amount of pure scientific research, if Scheler’s view is to be thoroughly consistent. It does seem, for example, that in the twentieth century a favorable climate for scientific research was enhanced by the century’s interest in the technological applications of scientific research. But in stating this notion, it does not necessarily follow that the “will to control,”

exemplified by an interest in technology, is the sole source of an interest in pure scientific research. All that is stated is that science and technology are rendered compatible in the present age, and that the climate created by each furthers the advancement of the other. This is not a relationship of the dependence of one upon the other, but rather a relationship of relative compatibility.

Scheler offers two examples from history which he thinks support his view that where the “will to control” is the strongest, the degree of technological advancement will be the greatest. On the one hand, he argues that the development of ancient Greek science lacked a strong “will to control,” and hence was more theoretical, than practical, in nature. He notes,

...Greek religion and metaphysics...excluded strong *will* and any positive *valuation* of production techniques that made use of machines, even after the development of the very rich pure mathematics and investigations into nature. There arose much less *actual* technology than could have developed within the technological possibilities that Greek science, mathematics, statistics, and the beginnings of dynamics provided; the technological capacity of Greek science by no means had been exhausted.¹²

If Scheler’s analysis is correct, it provides a clear-cut example of how the absence of a “will to control” results in the absence of technological advancement. But it does not explain the origin of Greek scientific thinking as a specifically theoretical enterprise, nor is it consistent with Scheler’s claim, previously mentioned, that science in its theoretical aspects is ultimately dependent upon practical interests.

The other example Scheler offers is that of technological advancements in both ancient Egypt and ancient China. He writes,

The beginnings of positive science (astronomy, mathematics, medical arts, etc.) in *Egypt* and in *China* were closely connected with vast technological tasks posed by the geographic and geopolitical conditions of these powerful monarchies, especially the tasks of regulating the Nile River and the two great river systems in China, navigation, coach-building, and architecture—all of which had been at the service of *political power* interests.¹³

Here it is clear that “science,” albeit not *pure* science, but “technological science,” developed under the influence of external factors. One would expect, therefore, that these societies would have also developed a strong “will to control.” But again, it can be asked: if the “will to control” was strongly developed in these societies, why did this not result in the development of strong theoretical scientific disciplines as it did in ancient Greece? Scheler attributes this lack of theoretical enterprises to a “lack of free philosophic speculation,”¹⁴ but if this is so, then it does not seem to support the thesis that a strong “will to control” will *in all cases* condition, affect, or have a causal relationship to the state of theoretical disciplines in any given society, insofar as “free philosophic speculation” is a necessary precondition for effective theoretical thinking.

Both of these examples, given by Scheler, have the effect of not supporting his main contention; in fact, they seem to deny it. Instead of proving that a relationship between life-interests and theoretical activities can be discerned, all these examples show is

that perhaps in those societies which have a strong "will to control" it would be likely for one to also find an interest in technological advancement. But this says nothing about what the foundation of purely theoretical activities consists in. It may be concluded, then, that theoretical activities do not have their ground in life-interests—surely not in some so-called "will to control"—and that Scheler has failed to show through his sociology of knowledge what external conditions, if any, are necessary for theoretical disciplines to develop within any given society. He has shown, however, that some external factors, such as narrow intellectual boundaries supported by a strong ecclesiastical order, can be an impediment to free scientific thinking. But the lack of such boundaries merely creates a supportive atmosphere for scientific activity and is not a necessary condition for its development.

One additional element of Scheler's sociology of science must be considered, and this concerns how Scheler thought a fully-developed "will to control" eventually results in the denial of human values. If one suspends judgment on the criticisms offered thus far, it has been seen that Scheler thought that theoretical science is dependent upon a strong "will to control." This "will to control" stems from certain life-interests that man has in controlling nature. These life-interests and the techniques for control that develop out of them are naturally viewed as being beneficial to man. Scheler did not touch on the view, as might be expressed in more recent times, that these technological controls may turn out to have more harmful side-effects than the benefits gained from them warrants. But Scheler was concerned about the philosophical foundations of modern technological advancements and the effect these philosophical views had on

the manner in which men regarded ethics and human values.

In this respect, the dragon Scheler set out to slay was that of philosophical materialism. He notes that the Middle Ages had an essentially dualistic ontology which permitted both natural, i. e., material, and supernatural realms. Values could be hierarchically arranged according to the degree of perfection an entity had attained. God, as the most perfect entity, occupied a position at the apex of this hierarchy. Ontology and value-theory meshed in two principles Scheler saw as being implicit in medieval thought:

1. "Every thing is good to the extent that it *is*, and bad to the extent that it is *not*."
2. "Every thing within the order of good *and* bad is either a higher good or a lesser evil the more *independent* its type of existence."¹⁵

The objective status accorded to entities in medieval ontology was, Scheler observes, rejected with the advent of post-medieval epistemologies which emphasized the role of the mind in acquiring knowledge of the external world. Although a dualism between material and transcendental realms was still acknowledged as late as Kant, with his distinction between what can be known via pure and practical reason, the "staticity" of the medieval world-view was replaced with what Scheler calls "...the schema of a *becoming stream in time*."¹⁶ This is most clearly recognizable in Hegel's philosophy. As a consequence, Scheler notes,

This...made possible the modern historical thought that considers all factual forms and arrangements of human society

as principally *transient* and relative, and which tries to explain them as consequences of demonstrable...*historical processes*—without influences from higher powers.¹⁷

In effect, then, the transcendent realm of value was stripped of its ontological status, and an organic world-view came to take the place of a mechanistic world-view. (The deism of the Enlightenment, for example, one of the chief expounders of a mechanistic world-view, still allowed for a transcendental God, and hence for the possibility of transcendental values, although both were located totally outside of the world-process; after this had been achieved, it was only one step further to deny or disregard the ontological status of the transcendental.)

Scheler notes that there are two ironies in this historical development. The first is that even though, as he believed, theoretical science is conditioned by the life-interests of men, i. e., by human values, the net effect of the modern philosophy of science denies in principle the very philosophical foundations of those human values. The second irony, for Scheler, is that, holding fast to his original contentions, it was the impetus of human values which propelled the formulation of this philosophical outlook, which only then in turn denied those values. Speaking of the "...value-freedom of objective existence, which all *modern philosophy* accepts," Scheler adds,

...this phantasm itself was conditioned by values and practice: namely, by the life-value of a world containing nothing but elements of nature that are subject to *control*, while all other elements are reduced to *artificial abstractions*.¹⁸

What becomes of the "will to control" after this shift has taken place? One would expect that since the "will to control" is grounded in life-interests, this philosophical shift would hinder its development. Quite the contrary, according to Scheler. It is, he says,

...a new *will to control* nature and soul—in sharp contrast to an attitude of love-filled devotion to them and to a merely conceptual order of their appearances—that now gains primacy in all cognitive compartments.¹⁹

This "new will to control" is not guided by any consideration for human values, and may perhaps be described as being something of a "blind force." A passionate consideration for nature, others, and oneself are supplanted by the notion of simple, valueless manipulation.

Scheler has touched upon a genuine social problem here, but one could criticize him on the grounds that he misplaced the source of the problem. At the beginning of this paper it was noted that Scheler held that the relationship between theoretical science and technology was one of the former's dependence on the latter. If this initial assumption is accepted, and if it is held that life-interests condition theoretical science, the rest can plausibly follow. These assumptions have already been criticized, however, on the grounds that Scheler did not fully understand the nature of theoretical science, and its expressed detachment from so-called life-interests, and hence from considerations as to how its theoretical findings might result in technological advancements. It is science's detachment from life-interests, in Scheler's sense of the term, and not its supposed attach-

ment to these interests that results in science's insistence upon what Weber called "ethical neutrality." But ethical neutrality—or in Scheler's terms, "the value-freedom of modern philosophy"—is a methodological directive for accurately establishing valid knowledge about the world. It is not, as Scheler seems to think, a substantive statement on the status or validity of ethical norms.

It seems much more plausible to adopt the following model—a model which stands in direct contrast to that advanced by Scheler: Theoretical activities are not directly conditioned by life-interests, and it is an important methodological directive for any external factors which could have an effect on the establishing of valid scientific knowledge to be eliminated, to the extent that is possible. The propositions so obtained possess of themselves no value, in an ethical sense of the term, but it is possible for human beings with value-objectives, i. e., life-interests, to make use of these propositions in such a way that technological advancement becomes possible. Assessing the value of these technological achievements must, in turn, be a separate activity from that of assessing the validity of the theoretical concepts on which they are based. Moreover, science itself, while it does not offer a philosophical foundation for human values, at the same time does not prevent a philosophical foundation for human values from being constructed on other grounds. One may echo Scheler's concern about a materialistic scientism which denies the philosophical foundation of human values on the basis of a narrow materialistic ontology and epistemology, without agreeing with him that the philosophical undergirdings

of science are themselves responsible for this outlook.

Scheler himself adopted an organic view of the links between theoretical activities and the practical applications of technology, by attempting to find concrete and direct relationships between the two, the existence of which one may rightly question. Had he emphasized the distinct characteristics of both pure science and technology, and had he not attempted to reduce all theoretical activity to a nebulous "will to control," many of the problems he encountered and set out to solve, could have been avoided altogether.

NOTES

1. Max Scheler, *Problems of a Sociology of Knowledge*, trans. Manfred S. Frings, ed. Kenneth W. Stikkers (London, Boston, and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980), p. 37.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 101.
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 102–103.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 76.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 106.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 111.
7. *Ibid.*
8. *Ibid.*, p. 117.
9. *Ibid.*
10. *Ibid.*, p. 119.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 122.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 103.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 104.
14. *Ibid.*
15. *Ibid.*, p. 123.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 125.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 126.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 127.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 129.