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VALUE-FEELINGS AND DISVALUE-FEELINGS
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH
TO SELF-KNOWLEDGE

TABLE OF CONTENTS: 1) *Two Views of Self-Knowledge*; 1.1) *The Constitutive Conception of Self-Knowledge*; 1.2) *An Eco-Phenomenological Approach to Self-Knowledge*; 2) *Phenomenology of Living Being-Knowledge*; 3) *Vital Senses*; 3.1) *Bodily Feeling of Shame: die Wegbahnerin zu «Uns Selbst»*; 4) *Ressentiment: Selbstflucht*; 5) *A Community of Life*.

[...] das ist die Einheit des Lebens, welche die Scham emporhebt und bewahrt gegen all das, was sie in zerstäubende Empfindungen zu zerbersten sucht. Die Scham ist also keine Form der Selbsttäuschung, sondern gerade eine Kraft ihrer Aufhebung: Sie ist die Wegbahnerin zu "uns selbst".

This is the unity of life which shame lifts up and preserves from all that could dissolve it into evaporating sensations. Shame is no form of self-deception but it is its opposite: the power to abolish self-deception; shame is the pioneer into our selves.

(M. Scheler, *Über Scham und Schamgefühl*)

1) Two Views of Self-Knowledge

As fascinating as it is insidious, the question of self-knowledge goes on tormenting, as a kind of Silenus, philosophers of every period. Without any pretence of exhausting the subject, I would like to briefly stress some "ecological virtues" of the Schelerian view of self-knowledge.

In the face of other models of self-knowledge, which do not provide an adequate account of our bodily experience and of its role in the process of formation of our psycho-physical identity – I am referring to, for example, the "constitutive" view – Scheler's model of self-knowledge, understood from an ecological viewpoint, provides a good elucidation in terms of the vital relevance of specific feelings, such as a bodily feeling of shame or a feeling of well-being, that contribute to our self-sense and to our being, more or less, openly oriented towards a

set of value-qualities of our environment. These feelings, which let us feel we are part of a reality that does not manifest itself in the form of a chaos of stimuli, are genuinely lively, not bloodless, and positive, and they can be centripetal and/or centrifugal. In any case, they presuppose the unity of a living bodily subject¹ and that of his or her milieu, and in favourable circumstances, they enable the foundation of a consciousness of life-*community*. For these reasons, they can be termed “value-feelings”.² Scheler’s model of self-knowledge also provides a good elucidation, in terms of “mortal” relevance, of specific feelings, such as resentment or spite, which involve instead our closedness to our environment and sometimes the withering away or death of our self-sense. These feelings are feeble – in their violence as well. They are negative and they reveal some form of impotency of their bearers. They can *falsify*, especially in resentment, «the real image of the world»³ and betray a «flight from self» (*Selbstflucht*), an «inability to “remain at home” with oneself (*chez soi*)»,⁴ that is to say, in their own living body and in the *milieu* correlated to it. In fact, in extreme or pathological cases, they can lose their intentionality. For these reasons, they can be termed “dis-value-feelings”.

1.1) *The Constitutive Conception of Self-Knowledge*

One of the most influential versions of self-knowledge today, mostly inspired by Kant and in the past few years by Strawson,⁵ is the constitutive (or constitutivist⁶ in certain accounts) conception of self-knowl-

¹ On living body see R. GUCCINELLI, *Desiderio e Realtà. Note sulla potenza e l’impotenza del volere secondo Scheler*, «Thaumazein. Rivista di Filosofia», 2 (2014), 365-369, <http://www.thaumazein.it/2015/desiderio-e-realta/>.

² On value-feelings with regard to resentment see M. S. FRINGS, *The Mind of Max Scheler: The First Comprehensive Guide Based on the Complete Work* (1997), Milwaukee 2001, 142-166.

³ M. SCHELER, *Ressentiment*, edited, with an Introduction by L. A. Coser, Translated by W. W. Holdheim, New York 1972, 76. *Translation slightly modified.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 95. *Translation slightly modified.

⁵ P. F. STRAWSON, *Freedom and Resentment*, «Proceedings of British Academy», 48 (1962), 1-25.

⁶ Cfr. for example A. BAGNOLI, *Self-Deception and Agential Authority. A Constitutivist Account*, «Humana Mente. Journal of Philosophical Studies», 20 (2012), 99-116. <<http://www.humanamente.eu/Issues/Issue20.html>>.

edge. The basic constitutive idea, according to Bilgrami's model,⁷ is that subjects who dedicate themselves to the knowledge in question and, at the same time, make themselves the "object" of this knowledge, are *agents*, exercising a certain *authority* over their mental life and behavior, and they have a *normative* status. In particular, subjects who possess values or normative beliefs and desires, or intentional states, «are authoritative about them».⁸ From this perspective, there are not minds isolated from other minds; on the contrary, there are minds situated in a social, norm-regulated setting of shared practices and beliefs. Minds so understood combine intrasubjective and intersubjective commitments that they can live up to or fail to live up to; they can have reactive *evaluative* attitudes, such as resentment, anger or shame, that, apparently, refer to their own living bodies, but in reality seem to be expressions of normative considerations and universal (at a human level) moral attitudes or depend, at the most, on their «evaluative tastes».⁹ So we can reasonably speak, in this case, of a "normative mind or taste", but we cannot speak with certainty of an "embodied mind", or a "naturalized and living mind". Following an "authoritative" tradition, Bilgrami limits himself to conceding that a subject is a «possessor of both the states of consciousness and the material states of the body»,¹⁰ but this acknowledgement does not necessarily imply that the bearer has a living body rather than a mere unity of aggregation. The notion of *agency*, which grounds our intuition of self-knowledge as a peculiar knowledge in relation to other types of knowledge, for example, knowledge of the so-called "external world" or knowledge of nature, is usually described in terms of a *first* person point of view and "intentionality" meant, the latter, for the most part, in the ordinary sense of "to have an intention or purpose", and not in the phenomenological sense of "to accomplish an act" directed towards (positive or negative) value and semantic unities and endowed with sense, that is to say, an act that encounters some kind of *reality*. The living body, supposing that it exists, is neither the

⁷ A. BILGRAMI, *Self-Knowledge and Resentment*, Cambridge (Massachusetts) / London 2006, 63.

⁸ *Ibid.*, xii.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 63.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 270.

leading actor nor a mere cipher. A clearer proof of this exists. Bilgrami himself defines his constitutive conception of self-knowledge as contrasting with the causal-perceptual conception of self-knowledge, without absolutely contemplating a phenomenological conception of perception:

*The idea that our intentional states are not [...] independent of our capacities for self-knowledge is what defines the idea of the constitutive role of self-knowledge, defines the idea that it is constitutive of the intentional states it is knowledge of.*¹¹

[...] the “constitutive” view, the view that self-knowledge *constitutes* intentional states.¹²

Knowledge of the world and others paradigmatically involves looking, seeing, hearing things in the world, including what others have to do and say – in general, a testimony of the senses. Testimony of the senses, or any inner cognitive analogue of the senses, is precisely what is *not* involved in the ordinary and paradigmatic cases of self-knowledge.¹³

In other words, between first-order intentional states (beliefs and desires) and second-order states (self-knowledge of...) there are «rule-like links because we are certain kinds of creatures, endowed with agency and with a capacity to exercise norms and values, which are capacities for things that are not reducible in any sense to a purely causal picture of the human mind and action».¹⁴

Between the normative (mental) world – I would say – and the physical world, in which causal mechanism rules, there isn't any bio-physiological world. There isn't any individual living body and there isn't even any kind of perception that can render an account of the specificity of its sensory and value-perceptual experiences.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹² *Ibid.*, 18.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 89-90.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 39.

1.2) *An Eco-Phenomenological Approach to Self-Knowledge*

In my opinion, the problem of how individuals should behave towards their environments – a problem of environmental ethics – is linked to the problem of their formation, in particular, in our case, to the problem of self-knowledge – an epistemological and onto-axiological problem. In an ecology, like actual ecology, sometimes conscious of its own holistic nature and more attentive to the rights of creatures, not only to the rights of “human” creatures,¹⁵ questions of environmental ethics cannot be genuinely elucidated if they are not examined in the light of the problem of the *selectivity* of a perception (the relevance of experiential content from the vital point of view), grasped in its *sensory-motor*¹⁶ character, and precisely in a *holistic* meaning (the irreducibility of the content of a perceptual act to a mere reorganization of a plurality of sense-data = atomism of sensation). The problem of selectivity, meant in this sense, is at the core of the process of formation and development of the Schelerian perspective of self-knowledge. So I will move “from the bottom” – from that phenomenological presupposition according to which perception that accompanies our movements, when we shift far and wide in the landscape that we usually inhabit, is not a genuinely free act, but is the basis of every position of the second level that we can take. If it is not a “free act” in the strict sense of the word, it is not even reducible to a causal mechanism. The landscape in question is a kingdom of dynamic-expressive value-qualities or *vital* qualities – a landscape completely *familiar* to us, in which we immediately feel the sadness of a weeping willow or the freshness of a green meadow or else the goodness contained in a honey jar. It is necessary to clarify, along these lines, the connection that subsists between the *living body* and the

¹⁵ See for example J. KRICHER, *The Balance of Nature – Ecology Enduring Myth*, Princeton 2009.

¹⁶ On ecological optics and on the “sensory-motor paradigm” see J. J. GIBSON, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception* (1979), London 1986 and, more recently, A. NOË, *Action in Perception*, Cambridge 2004 and A. DELL’ANNA, *L’emergenza del paradigma sensomotorio in filosofia della percezione*, Milano 2008². On these points, with regard to phenomenology, see R. GUCCINELLI, *Dal destino alla destinazione. L’etica vocazionale di Max Scheler*, in M. SCHELER, *Il formalismo nell’etica e l’etica materiale dei valori*, Saggio introduttivo, Traduzione, Note e Apparat di R. Guccinelli, Presentazione di R. De Monticelli, Milano 2013, XXXIII-LXIV.

environment or *milieu* (natural or psychological) in which the subject who constitutes the bearer of that body moves. In the indicated connection, we will uncover, not only the eco-value ground of the structure, or the primary order, of our “preferences” or rather «pulse attitudes» (*Tribeinstellungen*)¹⁷ in which, precisely, a primary identity begins forming itself, but also the pre-moral ground of that peculiar form of responsibility or co-responsibility that I would term “eco-responsibility”. From here arises, at least in part, that feeling of respect (or reverence), so close to the feeling of shame, that everyone feels, in the more lively moments of their existence, towards the environment and its inhabitants, with which moreover, in normal conditions, they interact.

The phenomenological view of self-knowledge, understood in ecological terms, is the view that self-knowledge begins “from the bottom”: from our living bodily experiences in a *milieu* – our own *milieu* – inhabited by other living beings (vegetables and animals). The environment or *milieu* does not necessarily, in my reading of the Schelerian account of self-knowledge, have a negative connotation. The world, *towards which every human milieu*, in virtue of its living being, *tends to move its boundaries*,¹⁸ is an infinite source of information, first of all, of value-qualities (primary, secondary – as *affordances* – and tertiary) that fill (or do not fill) our judgements (including value-judgements and self-judgement) with content and enable the provision of an elucidation of the dynamic of the process of self-knowledge (or self-deception) which realizes itself by means of the involved sensory and value-perceptual selectivity. In the case of resentment, it is a matter of “(self)-deception”, of disorder, and not of an *order of preferences and loves* or “*ordre du cœur*” of an individual, precisely because it consists in *subversion*, at the same time, of the stratification of those *facts* in which consist the values that imbue the reality.

¹⁷ M. SCHELER, *Der Formalismus in der Ethik und die materiale Wertethik. Neuer Versuch der Grundlegung eines ethischen Personalismus* (1927³), GW II, 171.

¹⁸ On this point in relation to the “sensory-motor paradigm of perception”, see R. GUCCINELLI, *Dal destino alla destinazione ...*, XXXIII-LXIV.

2) *Phenomenology of Living Being-Knowledge*

The phenomenologically based project of the post-Kantian re-foundation of ethics, which Scheler intends to realize and which finds a fundamental contribution in *Formalismus* – the possibility, then, of the “practical and sensible reason” revealing itself to be “embodied” and “individualized”, beyond every empty formalism, presupposes a re-foundation of the nineteenth-century physiology that could promote the non-mechanical turn in biology that Uexküll also hoped for. Care must be taken, in the development of a propaedeutical task of living being-knowledge, of what is being removed to the univocal image of reality, provided from a psychology of association and from mechanical physics, advantage; this is an image that is calibrated on the representation of a human being expropriated from that living body and those drives that make her or him an animal species.

Scheler’s aim, in short, is to deliver biology from the categories improperly drawn from the physico-chemical sciences and to protect the vocation of physiology having, like every “respectable” science, a specific object. Sensory-vital functions then must be wrenched, with the movement that models them, from the fictitious isolation and coercion that condemn them to a physico-physiological inquiry that essentially aims to have an economic-explicative efficacy. Such an inquiry certainly has a methodological justification, at least in the tension manifested towards the knowledge of an autonomous system endowed with its own laws. On close inspection, nevertheless, the system in question suffers itself from closedness, evident whether towards the external world globally meant or the living bodily creature, globally meant, that should constitute the subjective bearer of those functions. Sensations, sense organs, sense corridors, and so forth, of which the system consists, do not render a context of sense centred, in their reciprocal referring, on the living body and its dynamico-functional performance, but reduce themselves to a mere aggregation of parties that are «dependent on stimulations of nerve centres».¹⁹ The so-called analysis of sensations, which in philosophy finds one of its greatest representatives in Ernst Mach, re-proposes in a theoretical plan the unilaterality of this method, which, making a clean sweep of every sentient being, offers

¹⁹ M. SCHELER, *Der Formalismus ...*, GW II, 162.

an explanation of the senses completely extirpated from the experience that we can have of them: that «chaos of “sensations”»²⁰ which corresponds, precisely, to a bombardment of punctual stimuli. What remains in the shade, for Scheler, in this approach that is so myopic in the face of sensory reality, is the unitary function of the sense in general (the “inner sense” or the “external sense”), of the sensibility:

Jene Einseitigkeit aber besteht darin, daß man die allein reale *einheitliche Funktion* des sinnlichen Gesamt-Empfindens eines lebendigen Individuums und seine biologische Bedeutsamkeit und Gesetzmäßigkeit gar nicht untersuchte, sondern sich allein auf die Frage konzentrierte, was von einem Leib und dessen einheitlichem Lebensprozeß abgetrennt gedachte Sinnesorgane bei bestimmten sie erregenden physikalischen und chemischen usw. Ursachen, die auf sie wirken, für sog. “Empfindungen” bestimmen *würden*.²¹

One aspect of this one-sidedness consists in the belief that it is not necessary to look into the real *unitary function* of the sensory feeling (sensing) globally meant of a living individual and this biological significance and lawfulness. On the contrary, one simply concentrates on the question of what the determining function of sense organs, taken as disconnected from the living body and its unitary vital process, *would* be for so-called sensations on the occasion of physical and chemical causes that stimulate the sense organs.²²

To pass over the *unitariness* of «sensory feeling (sensing) globally meant» in silence means to undervalue or to not understand at all the relational structure that in some measure this function assumes when one at last lets it down into the real world. The non-integrity (non-wholeness) of this function, where one really discovers it, in fact compromises the possibility, for the correspondent organism, of grasping the sense of the «great “poem” of» its «environment»,²³ which could offer

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 163.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 162.

²² M. SCHELER, *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Values. A New Attempt toward the Foundation of an Ethical Personalism*, translated by M. S. Frings and R. L. Funk, Evanston 1973b, 148-149. *Translation slightly modified.

²³ *Ibid.*, 149.

itself only in terms of «“living words”»²⁴ or values-unities in which its sensations should find intuitive verification if they could constitute a solid texture. However, the unitary function – «die allein reale *einheitliche Funktion*», in its irreducibility to more or less useful and more or less fictitious representations, in which one tries to capture single sensory and organic elements – is “coherently” neglected, because the living being to which it belongs is ignored. It is the living being as «individual» that “confers” *unity (Einheit)* to that sensory and value-feeling (sensing) that is, till now, “unjustly maltreated”. Or rather, it is the living being that develops itself unitarily in the process of formation of feeling (sensing) in which it *forms* itself.

Among other things, the approximation of the method taken into consideration occurs twice for Scheler. In the first place, this method does not allow capture of the unitariness and the complexity of the indicated function, that is to say, the indivisibility and the modalities, that for other sides are indistinct, in which it can manifest itself: sensory modality and/or value-modality. From the Schelerian perspective, all evidence excludes a dualism of the function and, with all the more reason, of the perception in which the function is exercised. In the second place, the unilaterality of the method does not allow to grasp, for analogous reasons, the «biological significance» of feeling so understood and the specific laws that govern it, laws absolutely non-dependent, as such, from the particular structure of the sensory peripheral organs or from the localization of an eye, for example, or of a tear, in a vacant part of the organism, or rather, of a mere aggregation in this case. The non-acknowledgement of the «biological significance» does not arise from a simple oversight – we know it by now – but is the “guilty” fruit of the pragmatic removal accomplished by the science of nature and of the psyche, both incapable of receiving what cannot be classified as a mental event or a physical event and constitutes, for this reason, an importunate reality: the *organism* (in its principally bio-physiological structure) and, all the more reason, the *living body* (experienced in a vital sense as one’s own body). Scheler grasps, in its own finality, the *surgical gesture* with which one cuts off the *living body* from a universe that pretends to be only physico-chemical (at least psychical), when he

²⁴ *Ibid.*

observes – in the passage quoted – that in the analysis of senses we had to concentrate on the question «was von einem Leib und dessen einheitlichem Lebensprozeß abgetrennt gedachte Sinnesorgane bei bestimmten sie erregenden physikalischen und chemischen usw. Ursachen, die auf sie wirken, für sog. “Empfindungen” bestimmen *würden*» [«on the question of what the determining function of sense organs, taken as disconnected from the living body and its unitary vital process, *would* be for so-called sensations on the occasion of physical and chemical causes that stimulate the sense organs»]. In the use of the conditional («[...] *würden* [...]») which, in the ambit of a hypothetical period («bei bestimmten sie erregenden physikalischen und chemischen usw. Ursachen, die auf sie wirken [...]»), subdues so to speak the result of an experiment («[...] auf die Frage [...]») on the expressed condition, Scheler emphasizes the “mechanists”’ desire, however undisguised, to reduce the organic to the inorganic – the life to the non-life. Adopting the incriminated method in fact the “analysts of senses” rub out, with the living being, its sensory-value “preferences” as well, which reveal her or his “identity”, even if in an elementary form. Many questions remain, as a consequence, without answer:

[...] *was* ein einheitliches Lebewesen *faktisch* empfindet in einem seiner Lebensmomente, und wieso es dies und nicht anderes empfindet, warum es z.B. nicht empfindet, was es nach den Ergebnissen dieser Methode empfinden *müßte*, wenn es – eine bloße Versammlung von Augen, Ohren, Tastorganen und ihren Fortsätzen bis zu den dazu gehörigen Gehirnteilen *wäre*, davon lehrt sie uns *nicht das mindeste*. Noch weniger vermag sie uns ein Wort darüber zu sagen, warum die verschiedenen Lebewesen gerade über diese und keine anderen Qualitätenkreise und Modalitätenkreise von Inhalten der Empfindung verfügen.²⁵

[...] *what* a unitary living being *factually* senses in one of its lived moments, and if fails to indicate why such a being senses rather than that – for instance, why it does not sense what it *should* sense according to the results of this method *if it were* a mere collection of eyes, ears, tactile organs, and their prolongations to their respective parts in the brain. Nor does this method

²⁵ M. SCHELER, *Der Formalismus ...*, GW II, 162.

explain why different living beings have this range of qualities and modalities of contents of sensation and no other.²⁶

3) *Vital Senses*

I will just draw attention to a point that is essential for an ecological perspective of self-knowledge, because it allows us to define precisely, within this frame, the nature of the stimulus through a biological lens modified in a phenomenological sense.

All those movements that do not involve a living bodily variation do not constitute, precisely for this reason, an object of “vital” experience, that is to say, they are not biological stimuli. It does not matter, or not so much, at least, that an infinity of physical movements can go through physical bodies, organized even, or that, in a world quite “alien” to the nature of a vital world, ether waves can hit an eye or something that one supposes incorrectly being such. To avoid the employment of senseless words, it must be remembered that «*where* there are ether waves, there no longer are “eyes”; even the organism itself is only a *part* of a continuous motion coming from the sun to my brain!». ²⁷ To produce an effect susceptible of being felt and of priming an action, interacting with the motor tendencies, a possible stimulus, understood in the sense indicated, must be grasped *in advance*, or rather, before its effective appearance, from the «vital sense» (*Lebensgefühl*) that immediately feels its value (dangers, advantages, etc.), the character of invitation or repulsion capable of announcing it.²⁸ The vital sense consists precisely in «a unitary consciousness of my living body, from whose totality [whole] separate organic sensations and vital senses emerge only secondarily from the background, as it were, that founds them». ²⁹ It is a consciousness that every living being, in normal conditions, experiences in a spontaneous way. So the vital sense and its modalities express the unitary sense of manifold sensory-vital *functions* and *states* of our living body (appetite,

²⁶ M. SCHELER, *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Values...*, 149. *Translation slightly modified.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 154.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 341.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 339. *Translation slightly modified.

bodily feeling of shame, sense of freshness, etc.), irreducible to a mere sum of organic sensations or a mere sum of functions – to a mere sum of «sensory affections» (*sinnliches Gefühl*).³⁰ They concern the life of the respective bearer and the life of their *milieux*. These functions are exercised in determinate kinaesthetic perceptual circumstances. If we assume the stimulus in its specific bio-physiological meaning, then it does not determine absolutely a univocal reaction, but rather various types of reactions or «varierte reactions» (*varierte Reaktionen*).³¹

3.1) *Bodily Feeling of Shame: die Wegbahnerin zu «Uns Selbst»*

There is perhaps no vital sense capable of protecting and taking care of the *unity* of our life like the feeling of shame. It is especially in its bodily version, as a “bodily feeling of shame”, that this sense amazes us by the power, not of its will, but of its candour. In fact, shame reveals our body in its own “identity”, with his or her *name*, snatching it out of the arms or *anonymous embrace* of the mere *atomism of the sensation* (*zerstäubende Empfindungen*): it «bewahrt gegen all das, was sie [*unity of our life*] in zerstäubende Empfindungen zu zerbersten sucht»;³² it avoids our living body breaking up into a thousand small pieces and the possibility of its life abandoning it when it is still alive (*apparemment!*). Shame lets us feel our body with discretion, as if it were indeed what it is: our own “house”, our *Gehäuse*, our *Schneckenhaus*, like that of a snail. Just like a snail, with the same naturalness, do we carry with us the life of our body. Shame signals the instant self in which the intimate thread that binds us to our living body breaks. Every time shame is ready to raise us: «das ist die Einheit des Lebens, welche die Scham emporhebt».³³

In short, shame levels the road and it takes us back to ourself: *chez nous*.

Sie ist die Wegbahnerin zu “uns selbst”.³⁴

³⁰ Cfr. M. SCHELER, *Der Formalismus ...*, GW II, 335.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 167.

³² M. SCHELER, *Über Scham und Schamgefühl*, GW X, 115.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*

4) *Ressentiment: Selbstflucht*

Shame has nothing of *Ressentiment*; it reveals itself as a feeling diametrically opposed to *Ressentiment*. Shame is not a self-deception («ist [...] *keine Form der Selbst-täuschung*»); *Ressentiment* instead has “the stamp” of self-deception. It betrays a *failure of self-knowledge* and one of the more evident aspects of its process of progressive loss of “agential *authority*” is, precisely, the *flight from self*. “Selbstflucht” appears as an axiological *falsification* of a milieu and of the world modelled on this *milieu*. “Selbstflucht” appears above all as a flight from a living body. Here, the comfortable little house environment of the snail becomes a prison:

Die in jeden Affekt durch Hemmung eingewobenen inneren Visceralempfindungen gewinnen durch Hemmung des peripheren Ausdruckes das Übergewicht über die Empfindung der äußeren Ausdrucksbewegungen; und da ist alle unlustvoll oder geradezu schmerzhaft sind, so wird auch das Ganze des “Leibgefühls” ein ausgeprägt negativ bestimmtes. Der Mensch lebt nicht mehr “gerne” im “Gehäuse” seines Leibes, er gewinnt gleichzeitig jenes unlustvolle und distanzierende und objektivierende Verhältnis zu ihm, das so oft das Ausgangserlebnis für dualistische Metaphysiken (wie der Neuplatoniker, des Descartes usw.) gewesen ist.³⁵

Since all outward expression is blocked, the inner visceral sensations which accompany every affect come to prevail. All these sensations are unpleasant or even painful, so that the result is a decrease in physical well-being. The man in question no longer feels at ease in his body, it is as though he moves away from it and views it as an unpleasant object. This experience has frequently been the source of dualistic metaphysical systems – for example in the case of the Neo-Platonist and in that of Descartes.³⁶

5) *A Community of Life*

To take the living bodily needs and interests seriously does not then mean to consolidate that prejudice that sees in the drive for self-preservation or in the egoism, or else in the passivity to which seems destined

³⁵ M. SCHELER, *Das Ressentiment im Aufbau der Moralen* (1912), GW III, 62.

³⁶ M. SCHELER, *Ressentiment ...*, 71.

a body exposed to that remembered bombardment of punctual stimuli, the only expression of a living being. Only by highlighting the richness – and not only the limits – of the living bodily sphere and of the vital senses of animal and human individuals; only by becoming fully conscious of the many and various vital (reaction) answers that an organism is able to give to the phenomenon of the so-called external world, beyond the causal impact that reality can have on us; only in this way is it possible to grasp the genuine tendencies and drives of life in general: to experience them in our own life, in the rhythm of openness or closedness of our living body towards its layers of *ulteriority*.

In the vital sense, in which «we feel our *life itself*, its “growth”, its “decline”, its “illness”, its “health”»,³⁷ and in the normal activation of this sense; in the possibility, besides, that we have of refining it among others, tearing ourselves away from sensory “punctinism”, we can sometimes become spontaneously *attuned* with our milieu:

Während die sinnlichen Gefühle in keinem Sinne über die Punctualität ihrer Existenz hinausreichen, ist uns im Lebensgefühl auch ein eigentümlicher *Wertgehalt unserer Umwelt*, z.B. die Frische des Waldes, die drängende Kraft in wachsenden Bäumen, gegeben. Was aber von ganz besonderer Bedeutung ist, ist die Tatsache, daß schon das Lebensgefühl, *nicht* erst die geistigen Gefühle, der Funktion des *Nachfühlens* und *Mitfühlens* teilhaftig ist. Das Lebensgefühl vermag daher von Hause aus das Bewußtsein von *Gemeinschaft* mitzubegründen [...].³⁸

Whereas sensory affections never in any sense lose their punctuality, in a vital sense we are given the peculiar *value-content of our environment*, for example, the freshness of a forest, the living power of growing trees. Of special importance, however, is the fact that vital senses, and not feelings of personality, first participate in the functions of *post-feeling* and *fellow feeling*. Thus vital senses can contribute to the foundation of a consciousness of *community* [...].³⁹

In the non-activation of the vital sense, in its possible dysfunctions,

³⁷ M. SCHELER, *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Values...*, 340.

³⁸ M. SCHELER, *Der Formalismus...*, GW II, 342.

³⁹ M. SCHELER, *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Values...*, 340.

*Translation slightly modified.

in the impossibility of refining it, that affective tie can break, or rather, can manifest itself in the negative, in a sort of “affective dystonia”, in the incapability of “resonance”, to be *attuned* spontaneously with our milieu.

ABSTRACT

As fascinating as it is insidious, the question of self-knowledge goes on tormenting, as a kind of Silenus, philosophers of every period. Without any pretence of exhausting the subject, I would like to briefly stress some “ecological virtues” of the Schelerian view of self-knowledge.

In the face of other models of self-knowledge, which do not provide an adequate account of our bodily experience and of its role in the process of formation of our psycho-physical identity – I am referring, for example, to the “constitutive” view – Scheler’s model of self-knowledge, understood from an ecological viewpoint, provides a good elucidation in terms of the vital relevance of specific feelings, such as bodily feelings of shame or feelings of well-being, that contribute to our self-sense and to our being, more or less, openly oriented towards a set of value-qualities of our environment. Scheler’s model of self-knowledge also provides a good elucidation, in terms of “mortal” relevance, of specific feelings, such as resentment or spite, that involve instead our closedness to our environment and sometimes the withering away or death of our self-sense.

