The Erotic and the Eternal: Striving for the Permanence of Meaning

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Abstract

The paper presents three conceptions of 'conatus' that show the will to persist as being connected to the individual's participating in a culture or other collective entity and which present human striving as transcending mere biological givenness. The human strife as a movement between the 'erotic' and, the 'eternal' is analyzed in three conative 'myths' – 'eros' in Plato's Symposium, 'cura' in Heidegger's Sein und Zeit, and 'Geist' in Scheler's Die Stellung des Menschen im Kosmos.

Keywords: *eros; existentialism; platonism; transcendental; feminist critique*

I. Introduction: Conatus and the permanence of meaning

In this essay, I investigate 'conatus' as the 'will to persist' of an individual as part of a (cultural) collective. Moving beyond an understanding of a 'will to persist' as the common aspect of all animate entities by which they strive to stay alive (sometimes referred to as a 'vitalist' understanding), I focus on 'conatus' as an aspect of the permanence of meaning constitutive of human society and culture. Current philosophical anthropologies explain

the transcendental conditions of human existence[1] with reference to different interpretations of the 'conative' aspect in this second sense, and this is their foremost task.[2] My thesis is that the specific difference of the conative strife in human beings manifests itself as the quest for a permanence of meaning.

I would like to put into comparative perspective the multi-layered and understudied concept of strife as it can be found in three canonical texts which are rarely read side-by-side or under this aspect: Plato's *Symposium*, Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit* and Scheler's *Die Stellung des Menschen im Kosmos*. Such a comparative reading, should it be fruitful, at all, must avoid several dangers. Applying the concept 'conatus' must avoid anachronisms; it cannot lightheartedly be applied in the three authors. Then, there is the limit of time and patience (in the reader), which puts a full stop to the material which can be covered in the space of an article. I focus on three conative foundation-stories, the myth of 'Eros' in Plato's *Symposium*, the fable of 'Cura' in Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit*, and the term 'Geist' in Scheler's *Die Stellung des Menschen im Kosmos*. They each capture the defining features of the conative human striving in the form of a 'myth' which prior to a systematic reading tells of the origin of human striving and provides a starting point for further (ontological) investigation. The present essay explores these different concepts of strife as they negotiate the individual's space *in*, but also *beyond* contingent existence.

What connects these three and stands out to me is that they describe a movement between 'the erotic' and 'the eternal,' and that this movement characterizes human striving. With these three exegetic vignettes, I hope to shed light on the transition of the concept 'conatus,' from the ancient to the contemporary philosophical point of view and illustrate the philosophical relevance it might have, today. All three conceptions consider the striving of human individuals as not merely going beyond self-preservation. By inverting the common understanding of need, these conceptions propose that

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[1] Here, I refer mainly to current projects of post-critical philosophical anthropologies (including mine) for which Kantian considerations set the stage. See Pirmin Stekeler-Weithofer, *Sinn* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2011), 43: "In Kants Gegenüberstellung von 'transzendent' und 'transzendental' geht es daher gerade darum, jede Rede über ein solches vermeintes Jenseits immanent zu deuten, also auf Formen unserer condition humaine zu beziehen." (Translation mine; Kant's confrontation of 'transcendent' with 'transcendental' is aimed at interpreting all talk of an alleged hereafter as immanent, to relate it to forms of our *condition humaine*).

[2] Scheler states, for example, that the questions of a philosphical anthropology have gained much acclaim, in recent years, but, more importantly, that there is a new readiness to accept the possible answers to the question of who man is: "In dem Augenblick, in dem der Mensch sich eingestanden hat, daß er weniger als je ein strenges Wissen habe, von dem, was er sei, und ihn auch keine Möglichkeit der Antwort auf diese Frage mehr schreckt, schein auch der neue *Mut der Wahrhaftigkeit* in ihn eingekehrt zu sein [...]." Max Scheler, *Die Stellung des Menschen im Kosmos* (Berlin: Michael Holzinger, 2016), 6.

flourishing through striving forms the very foundation of human existence, and that this conative 'essence' is the point of departure for any comprehensive understanding of human existence.

II. Striving out of need towards knowledge: 'Eros' in the *Symposium*

a. The Myth and its implications

The origin of human striving, which for the Greeks equals its essence, is described by Diotima in Plato's *Symposium* through the myth of the personified 'Eros' – an allegorical rendering of man's conative essence: 'Eros,' a daimon (Geist), is the child of 'Penia,' whose name means 'poverty' or 'need' and 'Poros,' whose name means 'resourcefulness' or 'fullnes.' At a garden-party of the gods on Aphrodite's birth-day, 'Penia' rapes 'Poros' and they conceive the child 'Eros,' who inherits his mother's and father's essences. He is suspended between the poles 'fullness of wisdom and resource' (his father) and 'void of wisdom and resource' (his mother). 'Eros' is forever striving towards perfection born out of a lack of it.[3] This metaphor, for Socrates, captures the movement (and motivation) of a person who lacks love or beauty and is therefore drawn to beauty. In this striving, the person thus moved gradually ascends towards the final goal, Beauty itself.[4]

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[3] Plato, *Symposium* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1925). The eros-myth that Diotima relates reads as follows: [203b] "'That is rather a long story,' she replied, 'but still, I will tell it you. When Aphrodite was born, the gods made a great feast, and among the company was Resource the son of Cunning. And when they had banqueted there came Poverty abegging, as well she might in an hour of good cheer, and hung about the door. Now Resource, grown tipsy with nectar – for wine as yet there was none – went into the garden of Zeus, and there, overcome with heaviness, slept. Then Poverty, being of herself so resourceless, devised the scheme of having a child by Resource [203c] and lying down by his side she conceived Love. Hence it is that Love from the beginning has been attendant and minister to Aphrodite, since he was begotten on the day of her birth, and is, moreover, by nature a lover bent on beauty since Aphrodite is beautiful. Now, as the son of Resource and Poverty, Love is in a peculiar case. First, he is ever poor, and far from tender or beautiful as most suppose him: [203d] rather is he hard and parched, shoeless and homeless; on the bare ground always he lies with no bedding, and takes his rest on doorsteps and waysides in the open air; true to his mother's nature, he ever dwells with want. But he takes after his father in scheming for all that is beautiful and good; for he is brave, strenuous and high-strung, a famous hunter, always weaving some stratagem; desirous and competent of wisdom, throughout life ensuing the truth; a master of jugglery, witchcraft, [203e] and artful speech. By birth neither immortal nor mortal, in the selfsame day he is flourishing and alive at the hour when he is abounding in resource; at another he is dying, and then reviving again by force of his father's nature: yet the resources that he gets will ever be ebbing away; so that Love is at no time either resourceless or wealthy, and furthermore, he stands midway betwixt wisdom and ignorance [...]."

[4] Songe-Møller discusses Plato's choice of Diotima as 'teacher' of Socrates; she is herself 'wise,' that is: she is not striving for truth guided by the homo-erotic 'eros;' her identity as an old woman places her beyond the hetero-sexual 'Eros' of procreation; yet, her identity as a *gyni* makes her more of an expert in questions relating to child bearing and birth. Vidgis

> "Now then," said Socrates, "let us agree to what we have so far concluded. First, is not Love directed to certain things of which, in the second place, he has a want?"[5]

We must keep in mind that the previous speakers, although dismissed and corrected by Socrates, contribute to the overall picture Plato presents to us. From this emerges that what is wanting to man is this – unchanging oneness (it is also called: Truth, Beauty, the Good). The *goal* of 'Eros' (the second topic Socrates wants to discuss, after discussing the origin and essence of 'Eros') is to lead man away from simple gratification of the carnal desires towards seeing Beauty and Truth; this can be achieved "by loving boys correctly," for it is the homoerotic 'eros' which leads along this path.[6] The erotic strife does not refer to biological reproduction. Philosophical Love (the homoerotic 'eros') describes the conative as a striving for beautiful ideas or Beauty (Truth) itself – the erotic moves towards the eternal.

The persistence of man (as a species *and* as partaker of truth) is seen as an individual's endeavor. Man might 'use' a woman to sire his child and he might 'use' another man (or boy) to move towards Truth. The homoerotic 'Eros' allows him to appreciate beauty in the other (as likeness), then move on to Beauty itself, leaving the lover behind. In this conception, birth and reproduction can be instantiated in three different ways, each of which is but continuation of sameness: the maintenance of one's body by cell-reproduction, the continued existence of the human kind from generation to generation by way of 'copying' oneself in a child, and the realization of the eternal by parturition of true ideas (the last being the only way in which men can glimpse immortality proper).

b. Impossible difference – Receiving a feminist critique

The *Symposium* accounts for erotic strife as a striving for immortality (permanence, continued existence). Songe-Møller reads this 'Eros'-myth with the aim of a feminist critique. Her critique is first and foremost a critique on the exclusion of the feminine; more generally, it can be seen as the exclusion of difference. Departing from her critique, I maintain that the erotic strive for truth does *not* necessarily deny a substantial role to women in particular (as long as they participate 'as men'), but paradoxically it does deny a role to *all* individuals *as individuals*[7]:

Songe-Møller, *Philosophy without Women – The Birth of Sexism in Western Thought* (London: Continuum, 2002), 105.

[5] Plato, *Symposium*, 200e.

[6] Ibid., 211b.

[7] Setting as highest goal the Sameness or Unity symbolized, for example, also in the circle which forms the Greek polis of equal citizens; see Songe-Møller, Chapter 3 'The Logic of

i. Reproduction beyond sexual difference to the exclusion of the possibility of the feminine:

> My aim in describing the love discourse of the *Symposium* in these terms has been to show how the kind of metaphoric language that Plato uses in this text – images relating to sexuality and birth – facilitate a particular understanding of philosophy: philosophy as the highest form of reproduction – the reproduction of the One and of Likeness – with immortality as its objective and a radical homo-eroticism as its precondition.[8]

Attributing a more perfect form of reproduction to men and equipping 'Eros' with both male and female attributes not only moves towards a one-sex solution, but also takes away from the only way in which women are perceived in the first place – as *gynaikes*, that is: women in the biological sense of sexual reproduction.[9] One result of the *Symposium* in this reading is the (functional) devaluation of the female qua description of a male birth (of ideas). In the *Symposium*, according to Songe-Møller, Plato presents an account of a masculine birth, a birth only possible through homo-eroticism which allows for 'loving the same:' "The attraction is that of what resembles oneself, or more accurately, of what resembles one's own ideal."[10]

From an intellectual standpoint, writes Songe-Møller, Socrates could also have written about 'Eros' as a female figure, promoting love between the same sex as between women.[11] Or he could have opted for describing the highest love as a spiritualized union between the two sexes. The latter is an unlikely candidate because the union of the sexes, as we have seen, naturally results in biological procreation and as such necessarily ends in the consumption of carnal desire, not being suited to point towards anything beyond itself. The former is disregarded because women are variously described as feeble-minded (along with slaves and children) and only the most masculine women can become 'men' in their own right (and only if they dress up and 'act' as men), that is: they can participate only if and as long as they negate their femininity. Beyond observing that every declared identity

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Exclusion and the Free Men's Democracy.'

[8] Ibid., 112.

[9] "Phaedrus begins, since he is, as we are told, 'father of the thought.' Here, we should note that Plato is craftily inverting what was a well-known verse from a (lost) tragedy by Euripides (Melanippe): "The word is not mine, but my mother's. In Plato's text the source of the words is not the mother, but the father." Ibid., 95.

[10] Ibid., 96.

[11] Ibid., 92.

already rests on a suspension of the insight that (in a strict sense) nothing is alike, such identity-proclamations express definitions of relevance, or value.[12] To say that the 'gynaikes' are the non-same, excluded others, is to judge them less relevant than that which is declared the positive 'norm' (here: the male). These definitions presume gendered and value-laden dualisms, for example, that (ideal) sameness is masculine, and (non-ideal) difference or otherness is feminine. Yet, such a gendering of concepts seems problematic and, actually, counterintuitive.

Even if we put these gender-contentions aside, for a moment, what remains problematic is the conception of procreation as aiming for sameness, rather than allowing for difference. Where Songe-Møller first emphasizes the negation of the feminine in her reading, she extends her critique to the implied negation of love as interpersonal:

> The ideal of love that Diotima is made to advocate is something beyond all forms of interpersonal love; it is a love that cannot acknowledge and has no need of the Other, and which is unaware of differences – especially the differences of sex.[13]

An identity-philosophy with immortality (truth) as its aim can be attempted through companionship of sameness, but can be achieved ultimately only by leaving the other behind, standing alone gazing upon beauty.[14] Seeing the truth means to give birth to many graciously beautiful ideas and theories, concludes Diotima on a hopeful note.[15] The implications of this parturition are serious and, on further reflection, deleterious to individuality.

ii. The annihilation of difference: The argument for the denial of the feminine and of interpersonal love implies more generally the superfluidity

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[12] In speech, sameness on the level of statements and identity referring to objects are in general characterized by waiving more subtle distinctions which would always be possible, but are rarely relevant. In this sense, every topic owes its unity and identity to a kind of double negation in a logic of relevance: "Gleichheiten auf der Aussageebene und Identitäten auf der objektstufigen Ebene des Besprochenen sind generell durch einen Verzicht auf gewisse feinere Unterscheidungen bestimmt, die immer möglich wären, aber selten relevant sind. In diesem Sinn ist jeder Redegegenstand in seiner Einheit und Identität über eine Art relevanzlogische Negation der Negation bestimmt." Stekeler-Weithofer, 15.

[13] Songe-Møller, 111.

[14] We are reminded of Dante who sees God in Paradiso, only by looking past his guides and into the light.

[15] "Do but consider," she said, "that there only will it befall him, as he sees the beautiful through that which makes it visible, to breed not illusions but true examples of virtue, since his contact is not with illusion but with truth. So when he has begotten a true virtue and has reared it up he is destined to win the friendship of Heaven; he, above all men, is immortal." Plato, *Symposium*, 212a.

of the individual as individual.[16] It is not discourse which shows us truth, in Plato's model, but authority. Plato's liberating One delivers us from all differences.[17] It thereby also renders pointless our individual difference – our individual opinions, standpoints, our contingent discourses. Vis-à-vis the eternal, unchanging truth, all anecdotes of context and fleeting qualities of individuality are rendered meaningless. Inside the Platonic cave the prisoners have a certain kind of freedom – they have discourse, they talk, they hear themselves speaking, their standpoints matter. "As a child of the cave one can regard oneself as an individual with a personal – empirical – history; as children of the sun we are all the same, impersonal, and quite lacking in individual traits."[18] Where sameness is the goal, individuality needs to be overcome.

The parallelism between birth/reproduction and the description of love as the movement of philosophy shows humans as striving because they are lacking (in wisdom, in immortality), and it shows the eternal as the perfect aim of this striving. This conception is motivated by the perception of the mortal (impermanent) as lacking, and in need of reproduction. Biological reproduction is necessary for one (imperfect) kind of permanence, but needs to be overcome to partake of permanence proper. For Plato, seeing beauty, that is: Truth, the One, or Eternal Oneness, goes beyond interpersonal love. When we behold the eternal, all erotic desire ceases because the eternal itself does not know of deficiency or imperfection which are the things that love strives to overcome. Understanding the eternally self-identical also means delivering a true image of oneself to oneself and thus reaching perfect self-understanding. The philosopher (who gazes upon truth) no longer desires a person who resembles him, but Beauty (Likeness itself) and beyond that: he sees Beauty all at once and separated from the path of 'Eros' (privation), itself

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[16] Songe-Møller, 115. With Luce Irigaray's reading of the cave-myth as an investigation into the foundation of knowledge as reflection, we must observe that the prisoner who leaves the darkness of the cave is violently subjected to the reorientation of reason. Although blinded and disoriented, according to Irigaray, she soon falls under the intoxication of authority. "In order to illustrate what Irigaray regards as the fundamental problem of Platonic philosophy, it can be useful to think of the following image: just as the eye is attracted by the source of light, namely the sun, that makes it possible for the eye to see, so our soul is attracted by the source of all knowledge, namely truth. But the sun is paradoxical in nature. It is not just a condition for the eye's ability to see, it also threatens to destroy the sense of sight. The result of staring directly into the sun will be blindness. By analogy, those who open their souls to the light of truth without preparation are also in danger of being blinded, or driven to distraction. How can we receive the blinding light and the consuming flame of wisdom without risking the conflagration of our souls in the process?"

[17] "The ultimate aim of Plato" philosophy is to create the truest possible – meaning the most masculine and virginal – images of the form of the Good, or of the Father, as Irigaray calls it. Songe-Møller, 126.

[18] Ibid., 128.

not lacking anything. Paradoxically, this categorical separateness places the goal of striving outside of the strife. This same paradox we will encounter again in Heidegger and in Scheler.

III. Movement in the now towards the future (death): Cura in Heidegger

a. The fable and its context

The sixth chapter of *Sein und Zeit* is titled "Die Sorge als Sein des 'Daseins'" (Care as the Being of Existence). The fable of how 'Cura' creates the first Human Being is given by Hyginus in his *Fabulae*.[19] Heidegger quotes the original Latin in its entirety (followed by a German translation) in Chapter 6, Section 42 of *Sein und Zeit*. There, Heidegger refers to the fable as a 'Bewährung' (in the sense of validation): "Das im 'Dasein' selbst liegende Seinsverständnis spricht sich vorontologisch aus."[20] In the fable, the deity 'Cura' (*care* or *Sorge*) forms a human figure from clay, then Jupiter (spirit) breathes life into it, and Tellus (earth) gives from his body the material for the creation. The ensuing custody fight between Care, Jupiter and Tellus is arbitered by Saturn (time) who decides that Jupiter and Tellus will get back what they loaned upon the death of the new creature which is called after the material (humus) from which it was shaped: 'homo.' Care shall be allowed to keep it as long as it lives.[21]

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[19] Hyginus, *Fabulae from The Myths of Hyginus*, trans. and ed. Mary Grant (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 1960), poem 220.

[20] Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, Gesamtausgabe, Band 2, Abteilung 1: Veröffentlichte Schriften (Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann, 1977), 197. English: "The inherent self-understanding of being expresses itself pre-ontologically." (Translation here and in the following footnotes mine).

[21] Hyginus, poem 220. The full fable reads as follows: Cura cum fluvium transiret, videt cretosum lutum sustulitque cogitabunda atque coepit fingere, dum deliberat quid iam fecisset. Jovis interventi, rogat eum Cura ut det spiritum, et facile impetrate. Cui cum vellet Cura nomen ex sese ipsa imponere, Jovis prohibuit suumque nomen ei dandum esse dictitat. Dum Cura et Jovis disceptant, Tellus surrexit simul suumque nomen esse volt cui corpus praebuerit suum. Sumpserunt Saturnum iudicem, is sic aecus iudicat: Tu Jovis quia spiritum dedisti, in morte spiritum, tuque Tellus, quia dedisti corpus, corpus recipito, Cura enima quia prima finxit, teneat quamdiu vixerit. Sed quae nunc de nominee eius vobis controversia est, homo vocetur, quia videtur esse factus ex humo. Once when "Care" (a female deity) was crossing a river, she saw some clay; she thoughtfully picked up a piece and began to shape it. While she was thinking about what she had made, Jupiter came by. "Care" asked him to give it spirit, and this he gladly granted. But when she wanted to give it her name, Jupiter objected, and demanded that it be given his name instead. While "Care" and Jupiter were arguing, Tellus (Earth) stood up and wanted his own name to be conferred upon the creature, since he had given it part of his body. They asked Saturn (Chronos / Time) to be the judge, and he made the following decision, which seemed a just one: "Since you, Jupiter, have given its spirit, you shall receive that spirit at its death; and since you, Earth, have given its body, you shall receive its body. But since 'Care' first shaped this creature, it shall be hers for as long as it lives. And since you disagree as to its name, let it be called 'homo,' for it is made out of humus (earth)."

Sorge, or care, traditionally has a double meaning on which Heidegger's interpretation of the fable rests. In a footnote, Heidegger refers to Burdach's 1923 essay *'Faust und Sorge'* in which Burdach relates Goethe's reworking of a poem by Herder and the double meaning of 'Sorge.'[22] The testimony of the fable shows, according to Heidegger, *Sorge* as the key to understanding 'Dasein,' provided that Sorge is understood in this double sense, not simply as "Besorgnis," "Bekümmernis." *Sorge* in this first sense refers to burdens, worries or troubles.[23] In the second sense, care means "Für-Sorge," devotion or regard. Burdach emphasizes how it is more than effortful striving: Horace and Seneca connote concern and solicitude as 'Bemühung,' a striving which allows humans to perfect themselves towards fulfilling their potential.[24] This etymological observation (with Burdach) allows Heidegger to incorporate Seneca's interpretation of 'cura' as diligence/care, as that which allows man to achieve perfection – where divine perfection lies in divine nature and is completed 'naturally,' man needs 'cura' to achieve perfection to fully become human: unius bonum natura perficit, dei scilicet, alterius 'cura,' hominis.[25] Heidegger can understand the 'perfectio' of humans as accomplishment of, care, perfection is "das Werden zu dem, was er im Freisein für seine eigensten Möglichkeiten (dem Entwurf) sein kann."[26] The fable has a testimonial sense: "das Zeugnis soll zeigen dass die existenziale Interpretation keine Erfindung ist" (the testimony is intended to show that the existential interpretaion is not an invention; translation mine). It shows that the proper understanding of

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[22] Johann Gottfried Herder, *Werke, Erster Theil, Gedichte* (Berlin: G. Hempel, 1879), 18-20. The four last stanzas of Herder's 'Das Kind der Sorge': "Saturn sprach: 'Habet es Alle! / So will's das hohe Geschick. / Du, der das Leben ihm schenkte, / Nimm, wenn es stirbet, den Geist; // Du, Tellus, seine Gebeine; / Denn mehr gehöret Dir nicht. / Dir, seiner Mutter, o Sorge, / Wird es im Leben geschenkt. // Du wirst, so lang' es nur athmet, / Es nie verlassen, Dein Kind. / Dir ähnlich, wird es von Tage / Zu Tage sich mühen ins Grab.' // Des Schicksals Spruch ist erfüllet, / Und Mensch heißt dieses Geschöpf; / Im Leben gehört es der Sorge, / Der Erd' im Sterben und Gott."

[23] Virgil, for example, places before the gates of the underworld *ultrices curae,* vengeful cares. We also meet a sinister care in Goethe's Faust II whose sisters are penury (remember the mother of 'Eros' in Socrates' tale), lack and guilt, and whose brother is death. Heidegger makes reference to the Greek term μέριμνα, in biblical use with both connotations, (from μερίζω, to be drawn in different directions, but also: anxiety of things pertaining to earthly existence and care to be taken of), and in the Vulgata as *sollicitudo.*

[24] Unius bonum natura perficit, alterius cura, hominis – the good of the one is completed by nature, the good of the other, of human, by care, of human. Ellis, along with other English sources, understands this to mean that the aim is the good which the god reaches naturally, human only with the help of care; but, as Heidegger points out, what is achieved is not "the good," but perfection in each case. Ellis Dye, "Sorge in Heidegger and in Goethe's Faust*," Goethe Yearbook* 16, no. 1 (2009): 208.

[25] Heidegger, 264 (quoting Seneca, epistula 124).

[26] Ibid. English: "being free for its very own possibilities and becoming that (the projection)."

being is provided by 'time' (Saturn): The pre-ontological *Wesensbestimmung* (essential determination) of humans exhibits ex ante the mode of being which governs the temporal worldly progression of human existence ("Die in der Fabel ausgedrückte vorontologische Wesensbestimmung des Menschen hat sonach im Vorhinein die Seinsart in den Blick genommen, die seinen zeitlichen Wandel in der Welt durchherrscht").[27] In the double sense of 'cura' (given an understanding of the history of the term) and in 'cura's' life-long tenure of man (given the fable), we find a key to the essentially dual structure of life as a 'geworfener Entwurf' (thrown and projected).[28]

b. 'Historicity' as the self-referential aspect of care

Ellis Dye explores the connection between *Sorge* in Goethe's Faust II and Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit*, indicated by Heidegger's reference to and close reading of Burdach's "Faust und Sorge." The guiding question is – *as what* does Sorge show itself to Faust, what is its *apophantic* (self-indicating) sense for Heidegger?[29]

> When Sorge, and she alone, enters a chamber of Faust's palace, a rite of introduction takes place in which she answers Faust's inquiry: "Wer bist du denn?" with the puzzling words: "Bin einmal da" [...]. It may have escaped the notice of Faust critics, or perhaps seemed to them a negligible lexical coincidence, that this answer is a form of the term 'Dasein,' which in Heidegger means the same thing as personhood, a personhood constituted by facticity, i.e. the specific situation into which 'Dasein' is thrown and which determines the possibilities available to it.[30]

Sorge declares her identity as: Bin einmal da.[31] As allegory, *Sorge* could be what Scheler calls the *Innesein*, or 'inward perspective' of life.[32] But, as Dye

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[27] Ibid., 263.

[28] Or: passive and active, or: habituated or intentional. See Beatrice Kobow, *Der Sprung in die Sprache oder Denken als-ob* (Paderborn: Mentis, 2019).

[29] See Heidegger, 289. Heidegger uses *aphophantic* in relation to the truth of a statement which refers to the uncovering of being; truth points to, lets being be seen (apophansis).

[30] Dye, 210.

[31] In a privately distributed review of Jaspers's "Psychologie der Weltanschauungen" (1921), Heidegger shows that an ontology of "Da sein" is an ontology of the "Ich bin." See Dye, 212: "Sorge, like her repulsed sisters: *Not*, *Schuld*, and *Mangel*, is clearly an allegory, but what is the ontological status of allegory, or of any generic convention? Where does allegory reside in the world? If this very dichotomy were not so much in question, Sorge could be said to be more inside than outside."

[32] Scheller, 10.

points out, Heidegger marks as a misconception the idea that we are as selves opposed to a world and shows that only this misconception brings us to place doubt on the existence of the world; whereas, with Heidegger, we are always already in the world. *Sorge* proclaims herself as that which is *da* (here), and this identification essentially ties *Sorge* to the real-world indexical coordinates of a (lived) life.[33] *Sorge* forces us to face our contingency (given in the indexicals: here-now-so), while at the same time forcing us to project ourselves (violently outside of these coordinates) towards possibility. For Heidegger, the 'ancient fable' affirms the situatedness of humans in their existence; he has summarized this situatedness as 'Existenzialität' (existentiality), 'Faktizität' (facticity), 'Verfallensein' (fallenness), a structural unity which is brought into relief by 'Angst' (fear, anxiety).[34]

Sorge is shown to have an aspect of futurity and anticipation for both Goethe and Heidegger. Someone who worries "Ist der Zukunft nur gewärtig / und so wird er niemals fertig" – the ambiguity of possible translations of the second verse foreshadows our conclusion: he who is aware only of the future, never comes to an end; nor reaches a goal; he remains in flux; is never perfect. This describes Faust's specific character-trait of strife, Heidegger's idea of 'Neugierde' (curiousity) as 'Aufenthaltslosigkeit' (being without resting place),[35] and corresponds in an interesting way with Plato's description of 'Eros' as unhoused, without abode, in the very sense of an inner restlessness or striving; on the other hand, both 'cura' and 'eros' are said to be the driving force which allows man to achieve his potential. Both conceptions place the goal outside of the strife; thus, it must remain out of reach.

In his lectures on Augustine, on which he builds his analysis here, Heidegger speculates that in despair itself lies a kernel of hope (for the mercy

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[33] See Dye, 213: "The verbal complement "da" also eliminates the possibility that she is simply asserting her existence per se – her being as opposed to the possible alternative of non-being – and saying, after Descartes, "I am" or after God in the Jewish Bible: "I Am That I Am" (*Exodus*, 3:15)."

[34] Ibid., referring to Heidegger, Section 41. Dye summarizes: "As Dasein, we are the kind of beings who are worried about meaning, entities for whom our being is an issue, so Sorge's answer to Faust: "Bin einmal da," amounts to her self-representation as an inquisitor of the meaning of being, capable of luring the question of the meaning of Dasein out of its hiding place, according to Heidegger's definition of truth as aletheia or unconcealment. On the other hand, she lays claim to a contrary capacity to make someone in her power indifferent to everything: "Wen ich einmal mir besitze, / Dem ist alle Welt nichts nütze." (11453-11462) – the same power to make "Seiendes" slip away into "Gleichgültigkeit" that Heidegger attributes to Angst."

[35] Heidegger, 229: Curiosity, in contrast to Scheler, is not amazed gazing (taumazein), but knowledge for knowledge's sake and constitutes the three aspects of curiosity for him: Non-dwelling (Unverweilen), distraction (Zerstreuung), Aufenthaltslosigkeit (homelessness).

of God).[36] Care is not only appetite (orexis, or striving), as in Faust's most characteristic trait, but also hope and with it gives an end (or meaning) to the striving. Sorge presents herself as the interrogator of the meaning of being and attributes to herself the power to negate all differentiations and thus all meaning. In Faust II, Faust rejects Sorge and she has to leave. Before she goes, she blinds him: "Die Menschen sind im ganzen Leben blind, nun Fauste, werde du's am Ende!"[37] His last moments on earth are literally spent blindly, blissfully 'free of care' – in an inner brightness ('Allein im Innern leuchtet helles Licht').[38] Planning and organizing in the present, Faust states:

> Eröffn' ich Räume vielen Millionen, / Nicht sicher zwar, doch tätig-frei zu wohnen [...]. Solch ein Gewimmel möchte ich sehn, / Auf freiem Grund mit freiem Volke stehn. / Zum Augenblicke dürft' ich sagen: / Verweile doch, du bist so schön! [39]

This very line echoes Faust's wager with Mephistopheles in Faust I:

> Werd' ich zum Augenblicke sagen, / Verweile doch! du bist so schön! / Dann magst du mich in Fesseln schlagen, / Dann will ich gern zu Grunde gehn! / Dann mag die Todtenglocke schallen [...].[40]

We might, as audience, perceive this moment of self-deception at the end of Faust's life as tragic – it is the moment in which 'Faust' loses who he is by losing his strife; more than in his actual death (which follows on his reminiscence as an affirmation of the 'Augenblick' – "Im Vorgefühl von solchem hohen Glück / Genieß' ich jetzt den höchsten Augenblick"), Faust's self-deception is the very moment in which 'Faust,' prototypical example of human strife, ceases to exist.[41]

For Ellis Dye, Heidegger's self-perception of not having developed an adequate relationship with Goethe (as per his letter to Jaspers in 1949 with

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[36] Ibid. Heidegger refers to his lecture on Augustine as the basis for his work on Sorge in Footnote 3, 264: "Die in der vorstehenden existenzialen Analytik des Daseins befolgte Blickrichtung auf die Sorge' erwuchs dem Verf. im Zusammenhang der Versuche einer Interpretation der augustinischen – das heißt griechisch-christlichen – Anthropologie mit Rücksicht auf die grunsätzlichen Fundamente, die in der Ontologie des Aristoteles erreicht wurden."

[37] Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust II* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1986), 11497-11498.

[38] Ibid., 11500.

[39] Ibid., 11563-4, 11579-11582. Faust mistakenly takes the creatures, whom Mephistopheles commands to dig Faust's grave, for workers preparing the ground for building Faust's vision of a fertile valley.

[40] Ibid., Faust I, 1699-1703.

[41] Ibid., Faust II, 11585-11586.

which Dye opens his essay) and his conceptual unlocking of 'Dasein' with *Sorge,* a clue provided by Faust II, is bordering on self-deception:

> Indeed, the liquid term 'influence' needs to give way to something more complex and comprehensive – 'facticity' perhaps. We are not just suckled by our heritage, we are enveloped and informed by it. No single metaphor will do, not even that of sculpting, as when 'cura' sculpted 'homo' out of clay. [42]

In the justification of why the fable is given such a central place in the discussion of *Sorge als Sein des Daseins*, the meta-poietic[43] importance of 'historicity' in the self-referentiality of 'Dasein' becomes clear. This discussion also includes the peculiar anti-realism in Heidegger's treatment of realism in relation to Sorge as in §43c: *Realität und Sorge*, and the inherent paradoxical extra-situatedness of the end, here: death, vis-à-vis the striving. Considering this point in relation to the 'cura'-fable puts us in a position to refine our response to the criticisms against Plato's concept of an erotic conatus (in the conclusion). Heidegger writes in a 1921 letter to Karl Löwith:

> Ich arbeite konkret faktisch aus meinem 'ich bin' – aus meiner geistigen, überhaupt faktischen Herkunft – Milieu – Lebenszusammenhängen, aus dem, was mir von da zugänglich ist als lebendige Erfahrung, worin ich lebe [...]. [44]

The "ich bin" is, like the fable, an expression of 'Dasein.' The references to a permanence of meaning in Heidegger's Chapter 6 itself shed light on the issue of 'Dasein' as self-reflexive through historicity (in canonical meaning,

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[42] Dye, 214. See also, ibid., 215: "Goethe is a factor in Heideggers factic 'ich bin.'" This sentence challenges the adequacy of Heidegger's reading of *Dasein* qua *Sorge*.

[43] Poiesis – making/creating; Diotima refers to creation beyond mortality – 1) natural poiesis in procreation, 2) poiesis in the city through fame, 3) poiesis in the soul through knowledge. For Heidegger poiesis is a bringing-forth (a gathering, a fulfilling); meta-poiesis as main purpose of human existence, that is: the practice humans need to develop to encounter the modern world refraining from the two dangers, nihilism and fanatic participation: "The task of the craftsman is not to generate the meaning, but rather to cultivate in himself the skill for discerning the meanings that are already there." Hubert Dreyfus, and Sean Dorrance Kelly, *All Things Shining* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2011), 209.

[44] The text of this letter of August 19, 1921 can be found in: *Zur philosophischen Aktualität Heideggers*, eds. Dietrich Papenfuss, and Otto Pöggeler (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1990). Here, I quote it with Dye, 212, who remarks: "This statement, like others in Heidegger, prohibits easy distinctions between the self and the non-self. Heidegger's claim that he works concretely and factically out of his "Ich bin" reflects his criticism of Descartes's sum, which implies the separation of the self from its world, without involvement in which there can be no such thing as a self."

and ultimately: in language).[45] This is so even before Heidegger takes us back to his verification of the understanding of the meaning of existence (Sinn vom Sein) in his analysis of time (in the following chapters). 'Dasein' is characterized by historicity; it is always in some way 'understood,' even if the different modi of being are not yet differentiated.[46] Most commonly this entails the pre-reflected assumption of 'a world,' corresponding to the modus: fallenness (in which the present inauthentically dominates being and all action becomes busy activity, designed to further veil 'Dasein'; this is also the mode in which adhering to conventions (the 'man') provides solace; being is then seen as the cohering of things (res) – a 'reality.'[47] The basic determination of Being is as substantiality. The horizon of an understanding of 'Dasein' is shifted, it disappears from view because Being now takes on this sense of 'reality.' With Kant, Heidegger rejects the question whether the external world exists. This is not, as with Kant, on account of the world being given qua self, but rather vice-versa, the self being given qua world (against the assumption that the self could exist in isolation).[48] With this argument, Heidegger turns equally against realism and idealism. Heidegger writes that he seemingly, but quasi *doxographically* agrees with realism in the assumption of the existence of an external world. Yet realism misguidedly assumes this existence could be proven; whereas idealism rightfully denies that Being can be explained by or reduced to the existence of things, but does not give a comprehensive analysis of the 'res cogitans' and therefore cannot understand how Being can include the existence of an independent non-mental reality. This is, of course, possible because of the historicity of 'Dasein.'[49] It is in this sense that Heidegger's insistence on the fable not being an 'invention' comes to fruition: meanings are never 'invented,' 'set' or 'made,' but always revealed through lived circumstance which does not simply mean contingent

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[45] Dye quotes Goethe's words to K. J. L. Iken: "Da sich gar manches unserer Erfahrungen nicht rund aussprechen und direkt mitteilen läßt, so habe ich seit langem das Mittel gewählt, durch einander gegenüber gestellte und sich gleichsam ineinander abspiegelnde Gebilde den geheimeren Sinn dem Aufmerkenden zu offenbaren" (September 1827). Dye, 214. In an interview with Bhikku Maha Mani, a Buddhist monk, in 1963-64, Heidegger formulates this insight with specific reference to language: "Das Wesen des Menschen ist dadurch bestimmt, dass er existiert, indem er dem Sein ent*spricht*." (The human being is essentially determined as existing by answering to being). This very thought is also the turning point for Scheler.

[46] Heidegger, 261.

[47] Ibid., 266.

[48] Ibid., 273.

[49] Death (as that towards which my life is oriented) becomes an end which is doubly external: it is external to the striving of my life (Seneca, for example, among other stoic thinkers, denies that death is even an event of (my) life) and it is external to its meaning which is constituted with reference to past meanings and qua future projections (beyond death, purposefully ignoring its possibility).

material lives, but life in all of its complexity, including the historical sources of meaning, preserved in the canon.

IV. Movement of 'Geist' (deity) through 'Drang' (urge): *Mensch* in Scheler

a. The term 'Mensch' as 'Wesensbegriff'

Die Stellung des Menschen im Kosmos contains Scheler's views on some of the main aspects of a philosophical anthropology, a project he had been working on since 1922.[50] In this inquiry into the essential nature of human beings, Kant's question "Was ist der Mensch?" is examined and the alleged exceptionality of humans ('Sonderstellung') is put to the test. According to Scheler, "the educated European" (standing in for the Western tradition) relates the term 'Mensch' back to three different traditions: (i) the Jewish-Christian religious teaching of divine creation; (ii) the tradition of Greek philosophy in which humans are humans qua reason (logos, phronesis, ratio, mens); and (iii) modern natural sciences which in a theory of evolution describe humans in continuity with other life-forms (and might attribute the exceptionality-thesis to a quantitative surplus in intelligence and choice-behaviors in humans, or deny it altogether).[51] The project of Scheler's philosophical anthropology is to develop a unified and non-reductivist (non-vitalist) understanding of human beings. He bases his account on a 'Wesensbestimmung' (essential determination) in which the term 'Wesen des Menschen' provides the radical starting point for a systematic reading (like the myth of 'Eros' and the fable of 'Cura'); on this basis, Scheler can critically reply to different reductivist accounts, such as formal-mechanistic theories (for example: Democritus, Epicurus, Lamettrie, Hume, Mach) and vitalist reductivisms (such as, James, Dewy, Marx and Nietzsche), but also nihilism (Buddha, Schopenhauer), and classic dualist (e.g. Descartes) and teleological accounts of 'Geist' (e.g. Hegel).

In Scheler's account, life is characterized by certain 'objective' properties, such as movement, differentiation, formation, and spatial and temporal containment of an individual unit, a 'self,' but also by the essential feature that there is an inner sense in which this 'self' is experiencing life, a basic self-givenness (Fürsich-und Innesein).[52] This 'Innesein' is the basic form of 'soul' which even plants have. Anorganic matter is lacking a sense of interiority and self-givenness. It is the defining feature of life to possess an ontic center, a unique spatio-temporal unity which is 'individuality.' Plants, animals and humans partake in what Scheler

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[50] It is the script of a 1927 lecture which Scheler intended as a precis of a longer text to be published in 1929. Scheler died in 1929 and no continuous larger text on a philosophical anthropology was published posthumously.

[51] The cura-myth no doubt also echoes in the mind of the reader the Biblical creation story, responding to it and altering it in interesting ways.

[52] Max Scheler, *Die Stellung des Menschen im Kosmos* (Berlin: Michael Holzinger, 2016), 10.

calls 'Gefühlsdrang' – an unconscious, undifferentiated sense of striving, a mere object-less 'towards' or 'away.'[53] Plants have this sense, yet they do not have any feedback of the states of their individuality to a 'command center' and hence live ecstatically into their situatedness. Like all living beings, plants also already exhibit another core feature of life, an *expression* of their self-givenness, indicating a quality of life; for a plant this may be 'wilted,' 'strong,' 'abundant,' 'poor' (matt, kraftvoll, üppig, arm) and it is an answer to the question of how this particular individual is doing.[54]

Animals are specialized further and have an act-center, feedback of states to this center, specific self-movement in reaction to this feedback, associations, acquired reflexes, and in addition to expression the communicative ability to indicate their states to others. This feedback and modification of the status quo constitutes a second degree self-givenness for animals. It does not amount to self-consciousness, yet: all of the things that an animal notices and understands are contained in its environment. The specific difference of the animal (its urges, its perceptual apparatus) forms a closed unit with its environment. Thus, the animal lives ecstatically into its environment and cannot separate itself from it (neither spatially, nor temporally). In this way, it affirms the environment.

In contrast, humans can negate their environment. They can distance themselves from their environment, transforming it into 'a world' forming a symbolic representation of 'the world.' Where the interaction between animal and environment is closed, the interaction between human and environment is open and can be extended indefinitely. 'World-openness' is a defining feature of human existence. Humans are capable of a self-givenness of the third degree (sharing the first level of self-givenness with all life-forms as 'Gefühlsdrang,' and the second degree with animals as self-awareness): by being able to understand contingency in an act of objectification as 'dingliche Welt' (world of objects) and then applying this act of objectification to their own psycho-physical being (Sammlung), they gain self-consciousness (Selbstbewusstsein). Humans are only capable of this third degree self-givenness on account of 'having spirit.' "But it would be wrong," writes Scheler, "to assume that we have an additive model, that humans have in addition to the other psychic strata: urge (Gefühlsdrang), instinct, associative memory, intelligence and choice, just one new level in addition."[55]

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[53] Ibid., 14: "selbst die einfachste Empfindung ist nie bloß Folge eines Reizes, sondern immer auch Funktion einer triebhaften Aufmerksamkeit."

[54] Ibid., 13.

[55] Ibid., 32: "Ich behaupte: Das Wesen des Menschen und das, was man seine 'Sonderstellung' nennen kann, steht hoch über dem, was man Intelligenz und Wahlfähigkeit nennt, und würde auch nicht erreicht, wenn man sich diese Intelligenz und Wahlfähigkeit quantitativ beliebig, ja bis ins Unendliche gesteigert vorstellt. Aber auch das wäre verfehlt, wenn man sich das Neue, das den Menschen zum Menschen macht, nur dächte als eine zu den psychischen Stufen Gefühlsdrang, Instinkt, assoziatives Gedächtnis, Intelligenz und Wahl noch hinzukommende

The Greeks call this principle reason, but Scheler prefers the more encompassing term 'Geist' which, according to him, includes reason (thinking ideas), intuition (Anschauung) and understanding (of values as essential determination), and certain volitive and emotional value-acts (such as love, regret, awe, wonder, bliss, despair).[56] 'Geist' constitutes the exceptionality of human beings: Humans are *guided* by spirit (deitas, Geist) which is categorically different from all manifestations of life (in that these manifestations are all further specifications of 'Gefühlsdrang').[57] 'Geist' is opposed to 'life' and allows humans to inhibit their urges, distance themselves from their immediate environment and suspend an immediate (instinctual, affective, reflexive) psychophysical response to the resistance of the environment surrounding the self and experienced with anxiety. Through this distancing, humans are capable of transforming environment into world and self-awareness into self-consciousness. A third important characteristic of 'Geist' is its pure actuality. It is only actualized in the free execution of 'acts' by a 'person,' 'person' not being a concrete entity (a human being, for example), but a continuous organization and essentially determined order: "Die Person ist nur in ihren Akten und durch sie."[58] All aspects of soul are implementations of 'Gefühlsdrang,' they are realized 'in time,' that is: as a sequence of events and thus 'gegenstandsfähig' (objectifiable), whereas 'Geist' itself can neither in ourselves nor in another person be understood as objectified, only as that act which allows us to objectify the movements of our own soul (Sammlung). Therefore, vis-à-vis the being of our own 'person,' we can only 'gather our wits,' 'focus towards it,' but not place ourselves at an objectifying distance from it. In the same way, we cannot objectify the person of another, but understand it in a spiritual act of consummation (Mitvollzug) which is diametrically opposed to objectification.

b. Beyond biology and time: Cosmological limits of 'Wesen'

Scheler's conception of 'Geist' is unique in several respects and this is so by design. In contrast to the platonic and classical conceptions, Scheler considers 'Geist' to be opposed to the principle of life (inhibiting it); to be itself without any force or impetus (vs. classical and theist conceptions); and to be supra-

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neue Wesensstufe psychischer, der Vitalsphäre angehöriger Funktionen und Fähigkeiten, die zu erkennen also noch in der Kompetenz der Psychologie und Biologie läge [...]. Schon die Griechen behaupteten ein solches Prinzip und nannten es 'Vernunft.' Das Aktzentrum aber, in dem Geist innerhalb endlicher Seinssphären erscheint, bezeichnen wir als 'Person,' in scharfem Unterschied zu allen funktionellen Lebenszentren, die nach innen betrachtet auch 'seelische Zentren' heißen."

[56] Scheler, 32.

[57] Even increasing man's intelligence and the ability to choose indefinitely (the highest degree of specification of Gefühlsdrang) would not capture the specific difference, because it is a categorical difference.

[58] Ibid., 40.

individual and external to human beings (contrary to reductivist assumptions which deny anything external to biology). It is, indeed, a cosmological conception that he puts forth:

i. A life-inhibiting principle: How is 'Geist' enabling the openness to the world and the self-conscious self-givenness (of the third degree) of human beings? When Scheler thinks about 'sublimation' (of vital urges, of excess energy) and also about 'life-denial' (omne ens est malum),[59] he arrives at a conception of 'Geist' as that which negates life by suspending the 'Gefühlsdrang;' this entails the suspension of sense-perceptions and urges.[60] We must conclude that anxiety will be overcome in this 'ascetic' act of unmaking reality through a deactivation of 'Gefühlsdrang.' Thus, the effect for human beings is liberating, suspending anxiety, extending their reach beyond the closed interaction with environment experienced by (non-human) animals (as 'Welt-offenheit'), and presenting everything in the world, including themselves, as subject matter for understanding. Human beings as essentially determined by Geist are in this way external and superior to the world and their own being as a life form: "So ist der Mensch als Geistwesen das sich selbst als Lebewesen und der Welt überlegene Wesen."[61]

ii. A principle without force? The 'Geist durch Drang' – solution:[62] In a spectacular inversion, Scheler understands all power-relations to be universally bottom-up (instead of top-down).[63] Most powerful and independent is the anorganic order, then, descending from more to less *powerful*, plant-life, animals, human beings (Scheler none-the-less maintains a traditional nomenclature of life-forms whereby the further developed are called 'higher'). Thus, each 'higher' life-form

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[59] Ibid., 46-47: In actualizing of life-urge, human beings are masters of no-saying, ascetics of life (in Buddha's sense); this holds questions of value and ideology notwithstanding, be it that you might propagate a denial of life, deem reality itself as evil, or believe, as Scheler does, that there is a balance between Idea-Geist and reality-urge and that the calling of humans is to return to reality and their contingent existence (zurück zur Wirklichkeit und ihrem Jetzt-Hier-So-sein).

[60] See Ibid., 46. For Plato, senses and urges belong to one-another, that is why to philosophize is to 'continuously die.'

[61] Ibid., 40.

[62] We are reminded of the Charioteer-image of the human soul (in Plato's *Phaedrus*): two horses are pulling a chariot, steered by a charioteer. The obedient horse represents spiritual desires; the other horse represents carnal desires and follows its own immediate urges (carnal desire). The charioteer is reason.

[63] Ibid., 55: "Der Kräfte-und Wirkstrom, der allein Dasein und zufälliges Soein zu setzen vermag, läuft in der Welt, die wir bewohnen, nicht von oben nach unten, sondern von unten nach oben. In stolzester Unabhängigkeit steht die anorganische Welt in ihrer Eigengesetzlichkeit da – an ganz wenigen Punkten so etwas wie 'Lebendiges' enthaltend. In stolzer Unabhängigkeit steht Pflanze und Tier dem Menschen gegenüber, wobei das Tier weit mehr vom Dasein der Pflanze abhängig ist als umgekehrt [...]."

is vis-à-vis the 'lower' life-form relatively powerless and depends on the 'lower,' yet more powerful life-form for realization.[64] In its 'pure' form, Geist is without all force, power, and activity. Only its working on humans and effecting a suspension of urges (indirectly) lends activity and force to it: "Geist und Wollen des Menschen kann nie mehr bedeuten, als 'Leitung' und 'Lenkung.'"[65] We are reminded of the charioteer in Plato's metaphor of the soul which has to steer and direct the souls' powers. The traditional dichotomy body-soul is dissolved into the dual principles Geist-Life (as Drang), which, although in tension, are developed in accord: Over time, there is as a (necessarily historical) development[66] an (ever) further realization of spirit through life which is the aim and end of finite being and (temporal) events; while a theist account falsely places *creatio ex nihilo* at the beginning of this process, a mistake caused by the conception of 'deitas' as all-powerful, not all-powerless.[67] Both principles, 'Geist' and 'Leben' depend on each other, spirit facilitates openness to the world, self-consciousness and *meaning* (understanding of values and 'Mitvollzug'), life animates spirit: "Geist und Leben sind aufeinander hingeordnet."[68]

iii. Supra-individuality and externality of spirit: Scheler's idea of the realization of Geist through life is one of constant becoming and of Geist as supra-individual, yet realized in 'persons.' Scheler describes the peculiar phenomenon that human beings perceive space and time to be 'empty,' as existing even without being furnished by objects and events; this, he claims, is an effect of the ability to 'abstract' from the concrete environmental, psychophysical contingency:

> So blickt der Mensch, ohne es zu ahnen, seine eigene Herzensleere als 'unendliche Leere' des Raumes und der Zeit an, als ob diese auch bestünden, wenn es gar keine Dinge gäbe! [69]

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[64] Ibid., 56: "Jede höhere Seinsform ist im Verhältnis zu der niedrigeren relativ kraftlos – und sie verwirklicht sich nicht durch ihre eigenen Kräfte, sondern durch die Kräfte der niedrigeren."

[65] Ibid., 57. English: Geist and intention of the human being can never mean more than 'guidance' and 'steering.'

[66] Ibid., 44: "Eine 'konstante' Vernunftorganisation, wie sie Kant angenommen hat, gibt es dabei keineswegs; sie unterliegt vielmehr prinzipiell dem geschichtlichen Wandel. Nur die Vernunft selbst als Anlage und Fähigkeit, durch Funktionalisierung neuer Wesenseinsichten [...] ist konstant."

[67] Ibid., 59: "Die gegenseitige Durchdringung des ursprünglich ohnmächtigen Geistes und des ursprünglich dämonischen, d.h. gegenüber allen geistigen Ideen und Werten blinden Dranges durch die werdende Ideierung und Vergeistigung der Drangsale [...] ist das Ziel und Ende endlichen Seins und Geschehens – der Theismus stellt es fälschlicherweise an seinen Ausgangspunkt."

[68] Ibid., 73. English: "'Geist' and life are organized towards one another in an enabling relationship."

[69] Ibid., 39.

Equally, once having become 'Welt-exzentrisch' – standing outside of the world, and not being able to perceive themselves as part of the world, leads human beings to the question of their own standpoint and, in necessary consequence, to the question why there is a world and why they themselves are, and not instead nothing.[70]

Human beings are "'Mitkämpfer,' 'Miterwirker' der Gottheit": This does not mean that there is a personified God in whose fellowship humans stand (as slaves, servants or children), but instead that *they* are united in bringing about 'Geist' – this is 'Mitvollzug' (across individuals, across historical time and contingent place). 'Mensch' is thus the seat of 'Geist' in that the processes of lived life and of the entirety of temporal becoming of the world ("der Weltprozeß, den der Geist in Kauf nimmt") are necessary for any realization of 'Geist.' At the same time, 'Geist' is itself beyond space and time and beyond individual human beings, external to them. It is only 'cutting across' the temporal progression of life: "Die Intentionen des Geistes schneiden sozusagen den Zeitablauf des Lebens." [71]

The cosmological dimension of Scheler's conception is controversial because it entails an understanding of 'Geist' (as deitas) as not possessing any positive creative power ("so kommt dem, was wir den 'Geist' und die 'Gottheit' in diesem Grunde [der oberste Grund des Seins] nennen, keinerlei positive schöpferische Macht zu"),[72] but insists on this principle as highest reason for being and assumes that all temporal events are shaped by it, while denying a (historical) teleology, but affirming as aim the self-realization of deitas (indirectly) dependent on the processes of temporal becoming.[73] The human being whose ontic center is the 'person' provides the space of the realization of 'Geist.'[74] Thus, the spirit is external to the human being, but present in its 'person.' Scheler insists on this duality, partially, because he rejects reductivist accounts.

A simple move in Scheler's argument makes it possible for him to differentiate his own approach of the 'conditio humana' from most other accounts (at his time), opens them up to his criticism and allows him to show an alternative solution: Separating 'Geist' from the sphere of 'life' (defined

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[70] Ibid., 74.

[71] Ibid., 67.

[72] Ibid., 59.

[73] Ibid.: "Der Grund der Dinge musste, wenn er seine deitas, die in ihr angelege Ideen – und Wertfülle verwirklichen wollten, den weltschaffenden Drang enthemmen, er musste den Weltprozeß sozusagen in Kauf nehmen, um in und durch den zeithaften Ablauf dieses Prozesses sein Wesen zu verwirklichen."

[74] Ibid., 77.

fundamentally by 'Gefühlsdrang'), and declaring 'Geist' to be 'without force per se,' of working through and on life qua inhibition (Hemmung) of urges, instead.

"Man wird mir sagen und man hat mir in der Tat gesagt, es sei dem Menschen nicht möglich, einen unfertigen Gott, einen werdenden Gott zu ertragen!"[75] Recognizing the erotic movement towards the eternal as historically given and interpersonally realized, and ourselves dedicated to it, we can reject reductivism and embrace an order of ideas and values beyond individual strife and, yet, as its' end.

V. Conclusion

At the center of these three exegetic re-considerations stands the philosophical wonder at the complexity and meaningfulness of the canon. All three philosophical 'myths' render the question of a permanence of meaning as it poses itself to individual human beings and collectives, and with the aim of re-affirming a transcendental (that is, in this sense: non-reductivist) conception of the conative.

I have re-introduced to the reader three descriptions of conative strife which go beyond biological existence. In these accounts, the striving transcends the here-and-now of the physically given. The goal of striving has moved outside or beyond the strife. There are many points of intersection, congruence and difference of these positions which merit further inquiry. In sum, historicity as a self-reflexive aspect of the conative trumps an understanding of the conative strife as limited to biological functioning.

Let me conclude by pointing out several features shared by all three non-naturalist accounts. They show humans wrestling with the question of relevance, that is, with the question of how meaning can be permanent while being transmitted 'in time;' this concerns both individual mortality and the permanence of meaning in the collective. The survival of the species (partaking of immortality) cannot simply be achieved by psychophysical survival, but by sharing of and in 'immortal ideas.' The motivation for the (individual's) strife is privation and the fundamental movement of 'Eros' is a striving towards 'fullness' (possession) while this goal is categorically different from the strife (and thus placed beyond it; it can never be reached).

The three conative myths provide the starting point for the philosophical deliberation on the 'nature' of human beings, but they are also the reason for philosophizing: 'Eros,' as a striving from privation towards knowledge, initiates the movement of philosophical love (as path to enlightenment) for

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[75] Ibid., 78. English: "I will be told and I have in fact been told that it is impossible for humans to bear the thought of an inchoate, a becoming god!"

Plato. The cura-fable is a testimony of 'Dasein;' since 'ich bin' for Heidegger is the concrete facticity of the lived life and includes 'geistige Herkunft' – intellectual provenance as a fact, it is the engagement with this fable which begins and justifies the elaboration of asking for the meaning of Being ('die Ausarbeitung der Frage nach dem Sinn vom Sein').[76] For Scheler, an appropriate and necessary response to the world-excentricity (der weltexzentrisch gewordene Seinskern) of human beings is 'taumazein,' philosophical wonder.[77]

Plato has Diotima maintain that partaking of real immortality is possible,[78] to look upon essential beauty which is "not infected with the flesh and color of humanity;"[79] at the same time, she claims that

> every mortal thing is preserved in this way: not by keeping it exactly the same forever, like the divine, but by replacing what goes off or is antiquated with something fresh, in the semblance of the original.[80]

The reaction to this conundrum of divine immortality as sameness and human mortality as becoming is echoed in Heidegger and Scheler as a reaction to Kant's rejection of the questioning of an external world. Scheler writes:

> Der Mensch muss den eigenartigen Zufall, die Kontingenz der Tatsache, daß 'überhaupt Welt ist und nicht vielmehr nichts ist' und 'daß er selbst ist und nicht vielmehr nicht ist' mit anschaulicher Notwendigkeit in demselben Augenblicke entdecken, wo er sich überhaupt der Welt und seiner selbst bewusst geworden ist.[81]

The contingency of this fact is grounded (with Heidegger) in the facticity of a lived life; and, viewing essential beauty beyond humanity, is, of course, only possible from the vantage point of the coordinates of such a life. Yet, grasping the world and contingent existence in it takes place from a perspective 'between

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[76] Heidegger, 265.

[77] Scheler, 76.

[78] Plato, *Symposium*, 212a: Do you call it a pitiful life for a man to lead – looking that way, observing that vision by the proper means, and having it ever with him? 'Do but consider,' she said, 'that there only will it befall him, as he sees the beautiful through that which makes it visible, to breed not illusions but true examples of virtue, since his contact is not with illusion but with truth. So when he has begotten a true virtue and has reared it up he is destined to win the friendship of Heaven; he, above all men, is immortal.'

[79] Ibid., 211e.

[80] Ibid., 208a-b.

[81] Scheler, 75. In English: The human being discovers the peculiar coincidence, the contingency of the fact "that there is a world at all and not rather nothing" and "that she herself is and not rather not" with ostensive necessity in the same moment in which she becomes aware of the world and of herself.

ignorance and knowledge' (if we understand ignorance as not being self-aware, at all, and knowledge as viewing beauty entirely pure and unalloyed) and in a move from privation towards understanding; it is the move of the erotic towards the eternal of human conative striving.

A human being is 'in a mean between ignorance and knowledge,' striving towards perfection. In this striving she is dedicated to and held by care, which directs her towards the future and possibility, but binds her to her contingent existence. The engagement with her environment includes not only material circumstances, but also the canon by which meaning is transmitted. This is how humans are confirmed by one another (Mitvollzug) as 'persons,' the act-centers of a supra-individual, external, transcending order of values and ideas. This order is realized continuously and self-reflexively as a temporal order, as 'historicity' by individuals in their reflection of Truth (Geist, 'Dasein').

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