

Founding phenomenological sociology with Alfred Schütz and Max Scheler

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From the transcendental to the empirical

In this paper we want to re-examine the traditional belief that phenomenological sociology owes its pedigree primarily to Alfred Schütz. More specifically, we will try to show that Max Scheler is equally worthy of the title of founder of phenomenological sociology. Our argument has three interlocking themes. First of all, we will recognize, like many others before us, the undoubtedly essential contribution made by Schütz, who is generally viewed as the father of phenomenological sociology (on this subject, see the recent collection edited by Michael Barber, 2022). Our second step, however, will be to return to the foundations of this approach and to show that it throws up certain difficulties. As is widely known, Schütz's project is nothing less than to apply the Husserlian transcendental to the empirical. But, we will ask, is this attempt even sociologically admissible? And, if ultimately it is not, does this invalidate the possibility of a phenomenological sociology once and for all?

We will show that, while he rightly condemns Husserl's "pure" transcendental position, Schütz's attempt to use phenomenological reduction to conceptualise society fails, precisely because he persists in giving this form of reduction a typically subjectivist goal. Whatever he says, he continues to think about society through the lens of an egology, even

if it is one rooted in intersubjectivity. Our article will then return to the following questions from a stronger position: what remains specifically phenomenological about a perspective that dispenses with the transcendental ego? Is there a phenomenological methodology that can be useful to sociology – one that does not involve a return to the subject? Is it ultimately phenomenologically possible to recognise the existence of society as independent and autonomous from the subject? In order to answer these questions, sociology must interrogate the notion of *intentional relation to the world* that belongs to the phenomenological *method* – a method that requires particular forms of both empirical description and formalisation. As we shall see when we turn to Max Scheler, this approach is more promising empirically.

In other words, it is not, in our opinion, only through its epistemological contribution, generally conceded to Schütz, that phenomenology is of relevance to sociology. While phenomenology may fail to conceptualise the social by applying the transcendental to the empirical, as Schütz would like to do, it still has a power that remains entirely unexploited for developing a method of sociological investigation. By exploring concepts insufficiently explored by Schütz, such as Husserl's notion of intentionality and its equivalent in Max Scheler's phenomenology (the frame of mind) – while recognising the considerable contribution Schütz makes by redefining the sociologist's epistemological stance. We will thus see that it is precisely because Scheler opens himself more fully to the possibility of a social environment independent (and even constitutive) of the subject, that he also gives this form of sociology the means to think about the environment and thus ecology.

Schütz's epistemological contribution

In the middle of the last century, at a time when the debate between structuralism and functionalism in the social sciences was raging all over the world, Schütz's original contribution, recognised today by all sociologists, was to reintroduce the idea of "the natural attitude" – an approach completely foreign to the first two traditions. The natural attitude, wrote Husserl, is the attitude of "human beings who are living naturally, objectivating, judging, feeling, willing" (Husserl [1913] 1983, p.51), which appears precisely when epochē is achieved with respect to it. "I am conscious of a world endlessly spread out in space,

endlessly becoming and having endlessly become in time. I am conscious of it: that signifies, above all, that intuitively I find it immediately, that I experience it. By my seeing, touching, hearing, and so forth, and in the different modes of sensuous perception, corporeal physical things with some spatial distribution or other are simply there for me, 'on hand' in the literal or the figurative sense, whether or not I am particularly heedful of them and busied with them in my considering, thinking, feeling, or willing. Animate beings too — human beings, let us say — are immediately there for me: I look up; I see them; I hear their approach; I grasp their hands; talking with them I understand immediately what they objectivate and think, what feelings stir within them, what they wish or will. They are also present as actualities in my field of intuition" (Husserl [1913] 1983, p.51)

In order to be able to speak about this natural attitude, Husserl therefore believes that we must put aside what the sciences say about "the whole natural world which is continually 'there for us', 'on hand'". Consequently, "*all sciences relating to this natural world* no matter how firmly they stand there for me, no matter how much I admire them, no matter how little I think of making even the least objection to them; I make *absolutely no use of the things posited in them [von ihren Geltungen]*. Nor do I make my own a single one of the propositions belonging to those sciences, even though it be perfectly evident" ([1913] 1983, p.61).

In his last book – *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* – Husserl develops at length the idea of epochē applied to the sciences in general. This is a move aimed at getting rid of the "*garb of ideas*" that science adds to the world of life and the natural attitude (Husserl [1954] 1970, p.51). This modern science, whose paternity he attributes to Galileo, tells us for example that the earth rotates. But for we who are in the natural attitude, here and now, it does not turn. In saying as much, we carry out an epochē with respect to the scientific stance, "in regard to all objective theoretical interests, all aims and activities belonging to us as objective scientists" (p.135). This world of life that we then join is "the spatiotemporal world of things as we experience them in our pre- and extrascientific life" (p.138). When we have accomplished epochē, "we may use no sort of knowledge arising from the sciences as premises" (p.147).

Schütz takes up Husserl's work to show how helpful it can be for the sociologist to look at everyday life: "Even the thing perceived in everyday life is more than a simple sense presentation. It is a thought object, a construct of a highly complicated nature" (Schütz 1962,

p.1). Any knowledge of the world, for common sense as well as for science, “involves mental constructs, syntheses, generalizations, formalizations, idealizations specific to the respective level of thought organization” (Schütz 1962, p.58). The thing as it is perceived in the “natural attitude” that we deploy in the *Lebenswelt* precedes its scientific conceptualisation. “The concept of Nature, for instance, with which the natural sciences have to deal is, as Husserl has shown, an idealizing abstraction from the *Lebenswelt*, an abstraction which, on principle and of course legitimately, excludes persons with their personal life and all objects of culture which originate as such in practical human activity” (Schütz 1962, p. 58). However, it is precisely this level of the life-world (*Lebenswelt*) – from which the natural sciences must abstract – that constitutes social reality, the object of the social sciences’ investigation: “The exploration of the general principles according to which man in daily life organizes his experiences, and especially those of the social world, is the first task of the methodology of the social sciences” (Schütz 1962, p. 59). According to Schütz: “The thought objects constructed by the social scientist, in order to grasp this social reality, have to be founded upon the thought objects constructed by the common-sense thinking of men, living their daily life within their social world. Thus, the constructs of the social sciences are, so to speak, constructs of the second degree, that is, constructs of the constructs made by the actors on the social scene, whose behavior the social scientist has to observe and to explain in accordance with the procedural rules of his science” (Schütz 1962, p. 59).

Of course, these second-degree constructions are of a different kind than those developed in the first degree. It is this *difference* that we must make clear in order to claim any scientificity¹. These second-degree constructions are ideal-typical objective constructions. Based on their observation, the social scientist will develop the construction of a typical behaviour to try to identify its invariants. But these constructions are not arbitrary: “the whole problem of the social sciences and their categories has already been posed in the prescientific sphere, i.e., in the midst of life in the social world. To be sure, it is posed here in a very primitive form. The social scientist, as we shall see, utilizes methods and concepts which are quite different from the ordinary person who is simply observing another” (Schütz 1967, p.141).

¹ On the topic of the scientific interpretation of the lifeworld, see Staudigl and Berguno 2014.

According to Schütz, our first step must therefore be to focus on these *first-degree constructions* (and more broadly on what he calls the world of everyday life) in order to detect in them the (admittedly still *confused* and *primitive*) approach that will through a second step become that of the sociologist: “In a certain sense I am a social scientist in everyday life whenever I reflect upon my fellow men and their behavior instead of merely experiencing them” (Schütz 1967, p.140). The sociologist’s second-degree constructions thus deal with “conduct and its common-sense interpretation in the social reality” (Schütz 1962, p. 34), adopting in particular *the principle of subjective interpretation* – which Schütz takes from Weber (Yudin 2016, p.556). The sociologist should therefore look to “activities” within the social world and *their interpretations by the actors themselves* in terms of plans, of available means, of motives etc. Clearly, the central question is: how can we grasp “by a system of objective knowledge subjective meaning structures? Is this not a paradox?” (Schütz 1962, p. 35). According to Schütz, it is by means of particular methodological devices that “the social scientist replaces the thought objects of common-sense thought relating to unique events and occurrences by constructing a model of a sector of the social world within which merely those typified events occur that are relevant to the scientist’s particular problem under scrutiny”. In this sense, “it is possible to construct a model of a sector of the social world consisting of typical human interaction and to analyze this typical interaction pattern as to the meaning it might have for the personal types of actors who presumptively originated them” (Schütz 1962, p. 36).

Commenté [1]:

Could you check that this isn’t simply “in social reality” (without “the”)? If not, we should probably delete the “the” in this particular quotation and write “in . . . social reality”, as otherwise it is grammatically incorrect.

Commenté [SL2R1]: Je confirme...le texte anglais donne bien « il the social reality »

Can we apply the transcendental to the empirical?

We will not go any further here into the specific epistemological stance that Schütz defends². It is already well known how far his thinking has influenced all fields of the human sciences (Embree 2015), and American sociology in particular (Psathas 2004, pp.1-35). Schütz repeats several times that he conceives his project of a phenomenological sociology first and foremost as an *application* of the transcendental to the empirical. To put it more precisely, in his view, we must *apply* the descriptions of Husserlian phenomenology

² On this subject, see Laoureux 2008.

obtained following phenomenological reduction to the *empirical* material of social reality (the lifeworld as experienced by “men” with *the natural attitude*). This idea of *application* runs through his work. It can be found in a number of late texts such as the significant “Husserl’s Importance for the Social Sciences” of 1959, where he stated that “[t]he fact that many of these analyses were carried out in the phenomenologically reduced sphere, and even more, that the problems dealt with became visible only after this reduction was performed, does not impair the validity of their results within the realm of the natural attitude” (Schütz, 1962, p 149)³. Or again in a 1940 text – “Phenomenology and the Social Sciences” – which clearly establishes Schütz’s programme for a science of social phenomena: “Such a science will find more than a guide in Husserl’s investigations in the area of transcendental phenomenology, for, as we have already said, in essence all analyses carried out in phenomenological reduction must retain their validation in the correlates of the phenomena investigated within the natural sphere. Therefore, it is to be the task of this science to apply the whole treasure of knowledge opened up by Husserl to its own area” (Schütz, 1962, p 139). But in his first book of 1932, *Der sinnhafte Aufbau der sozialen Welt* (Schütz [1932] 1967) – which had previously been defended as a doctoral thesis – this idea is already clearly established. In its second chapter, Schütz analyses our private consciousness of time by means of reduction. His aim is then *to apply* these results to the domain of ordinary social life. At the end of the first chapter – devoted to “Weber’s methodological concepts” – he states unequivocally that “The analyses of the constitution of the internal consciousness of time will be conducted within the ‘phenomenologically reduced’ sphere of consciousness. [...] We will, however, only conduct the analysis in the regime of phenomenological reduction insofar as acquiring an exact view of the phenomena of the internal consciousness of time is necessary for us. The intention of this book is to analyse the phenomena of meaning in worldly sociality where we are dealing with the manifestations of the natural attitude. [...] Once we have understood the ‘problem of the inner development of immanent time [the problem of temporalisation (*Zeitigung*)]’ correctly by means of eidetic description, we will be able to apply our conclusions to the phenomena of the natural attitude without risk of error” (Schütz [1932] 1967 p.44; Tada 2019, pp.995-1012). In addition to the question of temporality, which is the explicit object of such an application in *Der sinnhafte Aufbau der*

³ See also 1966, p. 83: “For it remains true that whatever is exhibited under the reduction retains its validity after return to the natural attitude of the life-world”.

sozialen Welt, Schütz gives specific examples of possible applications elsewhere. Thus, in the text we mentioned – “Husserl’s Importance for the Social Sciences” – Schütz proposes to give “a short and, of course, entirely inadequate outline of some of the main problems of the social sciences, selected at random, to which certain results of Husserl’s researches can be and partially have been fruitfully applied” (Schütz, 1962, p 145). It is precisely this kind of application that we find in the formalisation of a sociological approach which ultimately turns out to be a presentation of phenomenologically-reduced frameworks of social representations and perceptions of the lifeworld.

But is such an *application* so straightforward? It does not seem to be. First of all, within Schütz’s work itself. Indeed, we also find in his work a firm and systematic critique of Husserlian transcendentalism – first and foremost, no doubt, in the form of transcendental *egology*. One of Schütz’s aims is to describe the structure of the lifeworld (*Lebenswelt*) as it is experienced by people in their *natural attitudes*: “by men, that is, who are born into this socio-cultural world, have to find their bearings within it, and have to come to terms with it” (Schütz, 1962, p 145). For the man who lives in the natural attitude, the world is from the outset intersubjective, practical,. Furthermore, Schütz suggests that by paying attention to the structure of the *Lebenswelt* as it is experienced in the natural attitude, we can let go of the famous problem of the constitution of the other, since in a transcendental philosophy, ego is the origin of our understanding of every being we encounter in the world. When we encounter the other, we project onto him the existence of a consciousness on the model of our own – we “constitute” him as an alter ego. But if we agree with Husserl when he gives priority to the “I” in this way – the “I” who apprehends others, on the transcendental level, as copies of himself – we come up against a solipsistic paradox: If we conceptualise society and the other on the basis of the transcendental ego sphere, then all other subjects become mere objects amongst others in the world, which get their meanings from “me”. The other subject outside of me thus cannot have its own identity, its own meaning by itself, nor is it the reflection of anything social. Schütz was one of the first to point this problem out. His critique is largely contained in a lecture given at the Colloque de Royaumont in April 1957 (see also on this point Ricoeur, 2004). After a close analysis of the fifth *Cartesian Meditation*, Schütz states: “intersubjectivity is not a problem of constitution which can be solved within the transcendental sphere, but is rather a datum (*Gegebenheit*) of the life-world” (Schütz 1966, p. 82). And again: “It can, however, be said with certainty that only

Commenté [3]:
Could you check this? It's perhaps "research".

Commenté [SL4R3]: Il s'agit bien de « recherches » dans le texte anglais

such an ontology of the life-world, not a transcendental constitutional analysis, can clarify that essential relationship of intersubjectivity which is the basis of all social science” (Schütz 1966, p. 82). In other words, Schütz considers the experience of the other to be a given that is just as primitive as the experience of the self, and as *immediate*. It is less a cognitive operation than a *practical faith*: we believe in the existence of others because we act with and on them.

Such a critique of transcendental intersubjectivity may lead us to question the method of *application* defended by Schütz. Can we really so easily leave various problems at the level of the transcendental attitude unresolved, and *apply* these problematic descriptions at the level of the natural attitude? Do we not thereby necessarily import something of these problems? While Schütz may criticize the Husserlian attempt at a transcendental constitution of intersubjectivity, as we have just suggested, he otherwise remains faithful to his idea of an *application*. Thus, in his analysis of the natural attitude – and thus in his analysis of the *social* world – he starts from an analysis of the face-to-face relationship, which he regards as “a basic structure of the world of daily life⁴” (Schütz 1962, p.221). This raises the question of whether his analysis of the natural attitude – which in many respects remains a constitutional analysis of the natural attitude – does not in some respects remain caught up in an egology, albeit a non-transcendental one. It is most often following an analysis that places the ego – or individual consciousness – at the centre of our perspective that the problem of the constitution of the social is posed. Even if he presents this egological analysis as an “illusory abstraction”, it remains for him an obligatory starting point⁵. Is this the best way to think about sociality? Can we, in other words, derive sociality and the whole of society from the face-to-face relationship between two egos, even if these are empirically given in the natural attitude? As we will now show, it seems to us that we cannot. Contrary to what is still sometimes argued (Barber 2022, pp.93-111), the starting point of Schütz’s analysis of intersubjectivity – even if it is non-transcendental – fails in part to recognise that between myself and others there is something like society and its culture. His

⁴ “Any theoretical analysis of the notion of environment” – one of the least clearly-defined terms used in the social sciences today – “would have to start from the face-to-face relation as a basic structure of the world of daily life”.

⁵ See for example Schütz, 1962, p. 218, where Schütz states that his analyses were first concerned with the “stream of consciousness of the single individual, as if the wide-awake man within the natural attitude could be thought of as separated from his fellow-men”. He then adds: “Such a fictitious abstraction was, of course, merely made for the sake of clearer presentation of the problems involved. We have now to turn to the social structure of the world of working”.

phenomenological sociology is therefore unable to register the irreducibility of the social.

The (inter)subjectivist dead end

This is a complex challenge that can no doubt be levelled not just at Schütz, but at phenomenology in general when it tries to comprehend sociality in terms of intersubjectivity. As the philosopher Jocelyn Benoist clearly demonstrated, in a book about phenomenology and sociology that had great success in France, the other certainly does not make sociality (2001, pp.19-41). In other words, sociality cannot simply be understood as “a higher form of intersubjectivity, obtained by derivation from lower, more basic and immediate forms of consciousness” (Benoist & Karsenti 2001, p.6). But while we cannot understand the social relation in general in terms of the intersubjective relation – which most often remains trapped in a face-to-face logic – some nuance here is necessary: “That the social can only emerge in relation to subjects, and in some way supervenes upon them – this is something that we, for our part, do not doubt. That it is something subjective – this what we have much more reason to doubt. That a universe without a subject is not a social universe is one thing. That the social only exists insofar as subjects encounter something that escapes them, such as an order that is not subjective, is a Durkheimian intuition that we, for our part, would not want to renounce” (Benoist & Karsenti 2001, pp.28-29). In short, even in the face-to-face relationship, of subject to subject, a gap or open space remains. We must recognise the asubjective dimension of the social, its *sui generis* existence. Society is a kind of “social *third*” element beyond the I and the other. It “is precisely in this third that the social resides as such, as it is encountered at a level that can no longer be reached either by the intentionality that stems from the subject or the counter-intentionality that is supposed to be returned to it from Others” (Benoist, J. 2001. p. 28).

In short, while Schütz does indeed renounce Husserlian transcendentalism here, he fails, in our view, to scientifically ground sociality in intersubjectivity precisely because he holds on to a subjectivist framework for understanding empirical phenomena – a framework that belongs in phenomenology to the transcendental sphere (Hammersley 2019, p.291⁶).

⁶ See also Wilson 2005, pp.19-51. Some try today to save the idea of a Schützean ego by saying that the way

Does this lead to the invalidation, for sociology, of the phenomenology in his method? Schütz explains again elsewhere that “the social sciences have to deal with human conduct and its common-sense interpretation in the social reality”, which necessarily refers “to the subjective point of view, namely, to the interpretation of the action and its settings in terms of the actor”. These interpretations lead the sociologist to identify “types” of action in current experience (Schütz 1962, p. 34).. But which ones? And how can they be used in sociological analysis? When we bring society back to the subject, or at best to the encounter between ego and alter ego, we say nothing about an approach that might enable us, for example, to propose a concrete description and an explanation of a social group in terms of its members’ shared social and cultural heritage, for example, ways of intentionally “living in” the world, of relating to it and of talking about it. In the end, one might venture to suggest that for Schütz, sociological phenomenology remains in development.

Schütz sticks to showing the value for the sociologist of diving into the natural attitude in order to find the individual who has experiences every day that lie beyond what the natural sciences can tell us about. This is no mean feat, and we have seen how this shift can be found today in one of the most original sociological approaches of our time. Schütz also sees how this natural attitude can be broken down into various “types” of attitudes, but he only ever uses Husserl’s examples without taking them further: the individual he is talking about is the individual who “perceives, touches, sees, feels, etc”. But no natural “attitude” is socially systematised in order to serve as a methodological framework for a sociologist in the field. Schütz, like Husserl, focuses exclusively on individual actors, their consciousness and their plans. If we want to go further than simply acknowledging the innovative epistemological stance that phenomenology can allow sociology to adopt, we must note that Schütz, unable to move beyond the idea that the social is ultimately subjectively constituted (between one subject and another subject), does not allow us to develop any general method that enables us to comprehend the social in its specificity. So we must turn elsewhere.

There are authors who, for various reasons specific to their circumstances, slip through the cracks of exegesis to find themselves on the fringes of the social sciences. This is the case with Max Scheler. His work, caught in a vice-like grip between that of the two

Commenté [5]:

Same question as last time: is this definitely “the social reality” and not simply “social reality”?

Commenté [SL6R5]: Je confirme : « in the... »

Schütz shows how ego can perform social roles in everyday life was more important for sociology than the objectivist Parsons’ conception of “social roles”, which met with greater success in mainstream sociology (Belvedere, 2019).

giants of twentieth-century German philosophy, Husserl and Heidegger, is today barely mentioned in sociology. Yet it has a rare richness. Until the end of the 1910s, Scheler did indeed develop his system in the register of morality and the philosophy of religion. It can be regarded as relatively conservative, both theoretically and politically. But in 1916 there appeared in final form his most famous and original work, *Der Formalismus in der Ethique und die materiale Wertethique* ([1916], 1973) – in which he undertook a total deconstruction of Kantian philosophy. What is important for us now is to see how Scheler, after writing *Der Formalismus*, would make a sociological use of phenomenological intentionality that is quite convincing and can be mobilised methodologically for the social sciences, much more so than Heidegger, whose sociological utility some have defended (Trujillo, 2018), even though he was little concerned with matters of empirical sociology. Indeed, Schelerian phenomenology, unlike that of Schütz and Husserl, does not need to resort to the idea of a subject or a constitutive ego, even if it is intersubjective (Frechette 2013; Kelly 2011, p. 23)⁷.

Intentionality as a new starting point

Scheler would thus slowly transition from philosophy to sociology at the end of the 1910s. This transition had a purpose. He wanted to carry out a critique of capitalism without compromising his rejection of the subjectivist rationalism that economics would inherit, according to him, from the modernity of the Enlightenment and, by extension, from Kant. Indeed, if understanding (or reason) is defined by categories that come to shape *a priori* the perception that man has of the world, why would the will to property and the desire to accumulate not be part of it, even if these were originally forms of social construction? Are we not dealing here, as Schumpeter wondered, with psychic categories that have guided behaviour in many circumstances (Scheler [1924] 2013, pp. 212-213)?

In order to resist attempts to naturalise the modern economy through its “inscription in the subject”, Scheler uses the tools offered by phenomenology, which he quickly helped to develop alongside Husserl. He broke away from it when Husserl published his famous

⁷ This is perhaps what has led to a sort of contemporary renaissance, as contributions on the subject are multiplying (see, for example, Gottlöber 2022).

Ideen I in 1913. It is in this work that the assumption of the Kantian subject, which had been eliminated a few years earlier, is reintroduced, much to Scheler's delight (Frère, 2006) – an assumption that Schütz, as we have shown, would not really manage to do without in developing the idea of an intersubjective empirical egology. While Husserl only took interest in the individual after *Ideen I*, Scheler turned increasingly to the social sciences in order to support the critique of the purely liberal economic model he observed in post-war Germany. In doing so, he ultimately subjected phenomenology to a veritable coup de force. To such an extent, moreover, that most specialists came to ask whether he was not “doing total violence to this new philosophical method” (Leonardy 1984, p.197). In our opinion, this question calls for a mixed response. There is no doubt that Scheler may have done even more violence to philosophical phenomenology than did Schütz. On the other hand, in contrast to Schütz, he manages to genuinely empiricise and sociologise this method. In his more strictly sociological work, Scheler would turn away from the question of reduction (principally discussed in his strictly philosophical work⁸) towards a discussion of intentionality, albeit under his own idiosyncratic terms.⁹

By intentionality, Husserl wrote, we mean “the own peculiarity of mental processes ‘to be consciousness *of* something’”. Consciousness can aim at the objects of the world according to different intentional modalities (love, hate, rationality, anguish, etc.) and exists only in this “aiming”. And, Husserl continues, drawing inspiration from Descartes: “We first of all encounter this marvelous ownness, back to which all rational-theoretical and metaphysical enigmas lead, in the explicit *cogito*: a perceiving is a perceiving of something, perhaps a physical thing; a judging is a judging of a predicatively formed affair-complex; valuing of a predicatively formed value-complex; a wishing of a predicatively formed wish-complex; and so forth. Acting bears upon action . . . loving bears upon the loved one, being glad bears upon the gladsome; and so forth. In every actional cogito a radiating ‘regard’ is directed from the pure Ego to the ‘object’ of the consciousness-correlate in question, to the physical thing, to the affair-complex, etc., and effects the very different kinds of consciousness *of it*” ([1913] 1983 , p.200).

Any consciousness (or cogito) is therefore always consciousness *of* something and in

⁸ As for example in [1927] 1976 or 1957.

⁹ Among which were “stream of consciousness”, “frame of mind”, “modality of consciousness” and “state of mind”. In this article we consider all these terms to be strictly synonymous.

a certain modality (loving, judging, wishing, rejoicing, etc). The same object can be aimed at as a “memory”, as a “desire” or as a simple object of sensory perception (sight, touch, etc.). To take up an example that Husserl would use until his final texts, “The house-perception aims at a house – more precisely, [at] this individual house – and aims at it in the fashion peculiar to perception; a house-memory aims at a house in the fashion peculiar to memory; a house-phantasy, in the fashion peculiar to phantasy. A predicative judging about a house, which perhaps is ‘there’ perceptually, aims at it in just the fashion peculiar to judging; a valuing that supervenes aims at it in yet another fashion; and so forth. Conscious processes are also called *intentional*; but then the word intentionality signifies nothing else than this universal fundamental property of consciousness: to be consciousness of something” ([1949] 1999, p.33; modified translation)¹⁰

Scheler develops a sociological extension of the phenomenological approach to the world thus defined. The main thesis that he developed in the 1920s in *Probleme einer Soziologie des Wissens (Problems of a Sociology of Knowledge, [1924] 2013)* is that it is possible to study social groups on the basis of the modes of “aiming” that they favour in order to apprehend the world. To avoid the subjectivist pitfall and to distinguish himself from Husserl – who restricts intentionality to the relationship between an individual’s aim and the object aimed at (such as the house) – Scheler more readily speaks of *attitude of consciousness (Einstellung or Bewusstseinstellung)*, which empirically allows us to understand intentionality in a broader social sense. Frings, in his work aimed at systematising Schelerian thought, gives the clearest definition of what Scheler means by this notion, which he translates into English using the very illuminating term *frame of mind (or mind-set)*.

A mind set (or a frame of mind) is an attitude of consciousness 'how' things appear in the human milieu. Depending on the nature of a specific attitude of consciousness, things around us appear in a specific light. But most of the time we are not aware of this or that attitude of consciousness and we presuppose that the way things are appearing amounts to their objective reality (...). Let us first look at mind-sets of the past. A thephantic mind-set dominated the age of mythology according to which earthly things and events bespoke the

¹⁰ The English translation uses the verb “means” in this passage – e.g. “The house perception means a house” – but we believe “aims at” is a more accurate translation of the original German, and so have substituted “aims at” for “means” wherever the latter appears in the original translation.

divine. The celestial bodies, the seasons, animals, mountains and oceans appeared according to a mind-set that attributed their existence to divine. By contrast in our time it is difficult for a capitalist to imagine for example, the fury of Zeus manifest in a thunderbolt (...). In the capitalist mind-set, things and entities of the world are experienced under aspects of profitability, capitalization and usefulness that pervade our technological civilization' (Frings 1997, p.169).

Each social group (group-mind) in fact develops a *relatively natural* worldview of its own, which precedes the constitution of the subject or actor (Sangervasi 2022, p.234). In relation to this worldview, every material object, every content of thought, which is 'universally' experienced by this social group as something that does not need justification, is taken as given (Scheler [1924] 2013, p. 74). The social sphere constituted by the world of others, and the historical sphere formed by the world of ancestors, are pregiven to the subjective sphere (my own inner world) but also to the intersubjective sphere (what I can experience with others) "in terms of a) reality, and b) general and specific contents" ([1924] 2013, p.71). As a result, "the sociological nature of all knowledge and of all forms of thinking, intuition, and cognition is indubitable . . . the selection of the objects of knowledge on the basis of the prevailing social perspectives of interests [and] the , 'forms' of mental acts, through which knowledge is gained, are always, by necessity, co-conditioned sociologically, i.e. by the structure of society." ([1924] 2013, p.72).

Perceived objects or subjective thought contents may be different for different social groups (in space and time) that have different streams of consciousness, different states of mind (Stickers 2020)¹¹. Thus, for example, it is understandable that for some social groups spirits and demons are givens (in attitudes of consciousness that privilege an imaginary modality, a magical modality, etc.) just as naturally and unquestionably as they are certainly not "givens" for us. The everyday world is therefore natural, not in the sense that it is based on a "natural" structure of subjective experience (the naive lifeworld where we perceive the house, where we love it, where we imagine it, etc.) as Husserl envisaged it, but because it is the product of a subjectively-embodied collective vision, which is experienced naturally. Each natural worldview is different from the next, and is related to the cultural foundations

¹¹ As will be clear by now, in this article we consider the notions of stream of consciousness, frame of mind, modality of consciousness and state of mind to be strictly synonymous.

of each social group (2005, p. 204). In other words, as with Schütz, the world of the natural attitude is above all social, and goes far beyond a simple intersubjective relationship between ego and alter ego. As Schütz notes with satisfaction, for Scheler: “the sphere of the WE is pre-given to the sphere of the I” (Schütz, 1962, p. 165) — and of the “you”, we should add. For in contrast to Schütz — particularly thanks to his use of the work of anthropologist Levi-Bruhl — Scheler manages to give a definitively social culturalist dimension to phenomenology without once again being drawn towards a transcendental ego.

A first empirical use of phenomenology: the critique of capitalism

It is in this vein that, at the end of his text, Scheler points out the principal European prejudice shared by Marx, positivism and most of Western thought: the belief that “the development of economy towards a capitalist phase, with its accompanying science and technology, should apply to the entire development of humanity [whereas] economism and the theory of class-struggle is valid only, *for a very limited and late phase of Western history*” (Scheler [1924] 2013, p. 146). If this somewhat relativist representation of capitalism hardly seems original today, it perhaps was so in those “1920s [which] saw the prestige of economic liberalism at its height” and which were far from suspecting the collapse of the utopia of the self-regulating market in the 1930s (Polanyi [1944] 2001, p. 148). Since Polanyi’s *The Great Transformation*, followers of Adam Smith have been told that “[t]he habit of looking at the past ten thousand years as well as the array of early societies as a mere prelude to the true history of our civilization which started approximately with the publication of the *Wealth of Nations* in 1776, is, to say the least, out of date” (*Ibid.*, 73)¹².

But the value of Scheler’s theses on this topic does not lie simply in their prefiguration of Polanyi. It lies above all in the “intentional” definition he gives of capitalism, which transcends the market restriction imposed on it. While Scheler may indeed hold capitalism to be a historical weed, he refuses to reduce it “to a given economic, political or ideological system. Because for him, the source of capitalism lies in the whole human being” (Frings 1988, p. 354). In “Christian Socialism as Anti-Capitalism”, an article that

¹² And it is probably no coincidence that Scheler offered a critique of Smith’s conception of both sympathy and value (Altamirano 2017).

barely precedes the *Problems*, Scheler had already attributed a phenomenological dimension to capitalism (anticipating in a certain way, for example, Castoriadis' attempt to do so), and thereby considerably extended its meaning. Capitalism is first and foremost an "attitude-of-consciousness towards the world" which has become the *relatively natural* and preponderant aim of our modern culture ([1919], 1982, p. 642)¹³.

It is in critiquing capitalism that he calls on sociology, which he conceives of precisely – and in contrast to Schütz – as the discipline capable of understanding and describing this powerful third element that influences our ways of thinking and acting. As Frédéric Vandenberghe writes, he "grounds the possibility of society in the encounter of the *socius* as a concrete and incomparable other that is mediated by the Other", rather than by the self, whether this is an intersubjective self (i.e. a self that considers the "other" with a lower-case "o") or not (2009, p.18). What interests Scheler is the way society structures our streams of consciousness, our frames of mind. Ego is constituted by others (rather than the other way around). And others, moreover, form the society that pre-exists this ego – a society that has become overwhelmingly capitalist.

Through the juxtaposition of sociology and phenomenological intentionality, Scheler shows that capitalism is not simply a model of economic exchange but a modern way of understanding all objects in the world, which are seen either as a source of profit or capitalisation, or as not being so. "Since the attitude of consciousness is not conscious as such, it is things and objects themselves that demand profit and their capitalisation from man, and incite him to launch himself without limit into the accumulation of things, of commodities. 'Everything' is capitalizable from the outset, not only commodities, but also the atom, the universe, a human voice, Eros, art, education, sport, and even religious objects (indulgences). Things themselves look at man in terms of their possibility of capitalisation. They make the same request of him: 'See what profit you can make from me'" (Frings 1988, p. 356). Everything is a source of profit and utility from the viewpoint – and for the *attitude of consciousness* – of the capitalist mind. This is why state socialism is no less capitalist than capitalism itself. The pursuit of profit knows no class boundaries, and even if the worker pursuing his wage only pursues a "small profit", he is still a "small capitalist" in comparison to the "big capitalist" who is his boss. Class difference does not affect the fact

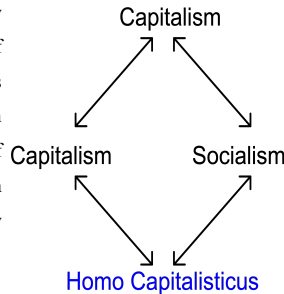
¹³ Under this term, we shall group the German notions of Kapitalistische Geist, Kapitalistische Einstellung and Kapitalistische Bewusstseins-einstellung, which Scheler uses interchangeably.

that every individual perceives the world “from” a state of consciousness intentionally aimed at a world whose various elements can be acquired, whether by the boss, the peasant, the worker or the state.

Thus Scheler largely anticipates later ecological critiques of Marxism (André Gorz, Ivan Illich, etc.), suggesting that it is ultimately based on an industrialist ethos that is just as productivist as capitalism. “The mind set of capitalism, the ethos of industrialism, preceded modern technology: a boundless drive for work and profit, a drive that only later would start up modern technical machinery” (Gunderson, R, 2017a, p. 407). Scheler calls the ethos of industrialism – the subordination of life values to utility values – “the most profound perversion of the hierarchy of values” (*Ibid.*) in reference to his famous work about ethics, *Der Formalismus*: “the preference for usefulness, profit, and technological expansion over life and its development, ‘determines’ and is the ‘source’ of the modern mechanistic worldview” of each individual in a capitalist society, whether he supports revolution or not (*Ibid.*, p. 408)

To grasp Scheler’s argument, we can take up and complete (in blue) the schema proposed by Frings:

In such a mind-set where everything, even human beings themselves, are automatically assessed according to their quantity of accumulated successes achieved on the social battle field of competition, we are confronted with a rampant, rapacious disposition that underlies such an area, and not merely with political capitalism alone. (Here, we can see that) the mind-set of capitalism is distinguished from political and economic socialism and capitalism. This distinction is rendered henceforth by capitalizing the mind-set under discussion (1997. p. 172)



Modern man is a *homo capitalisticus* whose inescapable characteristic is that he passes all forms of his consciousness’ intentional aims through the lens of utility and profit ([1919], 1982, p. 632). “His attitude of consciousness presents the world to him as a market in which things are to be acquired or not. Consequently, there is no individual whose

consciousness can modulate an intentional attitude that escapes this new capitalist formalisation of his cognitive categories. Scheler's intuition about the march of history thus seems relevant for the time. His basic assumption is that it is indeed easier to organise a general collectivisation of goods than to uproot the capitalist spirit because this way of thinking (*gesinnung*) is based on capitalist facts that man is all the less able to dominate the deeper they are" in our culture (Frings 1988, p.359). Contrary to state socialism, Scheler concludes from these premises that any attempt to drive history, through practical reforms, along paths defined for the long term is doomed to failure.

This criticism, essentially directed against Marx, would evidently lead Scheler to consider what a non-capitalist *attitude of consciousness* could look like – one that does not simply develop the photographic negative embodied by centralised socialism. His first solution, following on from his work on ethical formalism and sympathy, would be a Christian socialism, as the title of his 1919 text indicates. In it, he describes what might be an intentional aim that makes it possible for us to adopt an intentional attitude towards the world other than that of the search for profit. The world is then no longer synonymous with the market, since we seek primarily to create a social bond with others. The morality that equips the Christian critique of capitalism – and which would be secularised later with Scheler's sociological conversion – is a morality of sympathy. The capitalist *attitude of conscience* towards the world consists of a utility-maximising illusion that relegates the sympathetic attitude (of consciousness) – the authentic vector of the social bond – to second place. Thanks to this "egocentric and solipsistic attitude", the existence of our fellow human beings "for us is in fact dependent on our own nature and range of interests" (Scheler [1913] 2017, p.59). This illusion vanishes if we allow ourselves to be "reoriented" by sympathy. In the attitude of "sympathetic" consciousness, we leave a relationship with the "I" and establish a genuine affective participation with the "I" of others, thus founding a community that has a transversal humanity. We become capable of understanding the affective states of others (without feeling the same joy or pain) and of sympathising with them sufficiently to ultimately engage in action – this is true sympathy (pp.41-42).

We have seen that it is possible to link social preoccupations with an epistemology directly inspired by Schütz. But we also had to note that his work does not enable us to deploy a genuinely sociological methodology that can help the sociologist comprehend the

social world as such, or even to categorise the groups that make it up according to certain characteristics or certain relationships to the world. What the notion of “attitude of consciousness” or “intentional state of mind” allows us to develop is really a model of social subjects’ social apprehension of the world. It is understandable that some today try to show the significant links that can be made between Scheler and the thinker considered to be the founding father of French sociology, his contemporary Émile Durkheim. Indeed, Scheler, like Durkheim, insisted that solidarity is an expression of that attitude of sympathetic consciousness that humans can spontaneously experience in the natural attitude (Gangas, 2011). The challenge for the future of humanity will be to galvanise this sympathetic state of mind “which occurs in subjects who participate with their own *Leib* [in] the same universal life-stream” (Gattafoni, 2020, p. 47).

What is referred to here as a life-stream or a frame of mind shared by humans is also what allows us to claim that Scheler is a proto-environmentalist (Gunderson, R, 2017a). Since “in modern capitalist societies, nature has been ‘reduce[d] to a mechanism for the purpose of ruling it’” (Gunderson 2017b, p.68), as Scheler argues in his late text *Die Stellung des Menschen in Kosmos*, we have sidelined all the representations and ideas related to this sphere of the life stream that “bestowed on the human being a vigor that enabled him to maintain himself in his world [and] preceded all knowledge and cognition directed especially to the truth ” ([1928] 2009, pp. 64-65). We therefore have to galvanise love and sympathy to bring about another way to coexist with all living beings within this life stream. This is why, even if he maintains a spiritual distinction between humans and animals, Scheler dedicates many pages in this text to a critique of Descartes and the way in which, by attempting to separate spirit and nature (the former dominating the later), he totally neglected this life stream “in both human beings and in animals [as] the system of drives which is the unit of the mediation between any genuine movement of life and the contents of consciousness” ([1928] 2009, p. 54). “Only by casting off the ethos of industrialism can modern societies preserve ‘plant and animal life, and the woods, and ... [protect] the landscape against the devastating tendencies of industrialism’” (Gunderson 2017a, p.408, quoting Scheler). Promote a non-capitalist frame of mind in everyday life and “everything else follows: social, economic, and political changes; the possibility of earth as ground of, or even a member of a community; animals as members of a community; organisms as valuing beings, not objects” (McCune, 2014, p. 67). Such was the thinking of the late

Scheler, who had become a pantheist.

Conclusion

It is an entire sociological approach that opens up here – an approach whose path was cleared, in our view, by Scheler’s resumption of the Husserlian project. In our opinion, it is more with Scheler than with Schütz – who perhaps remains too close to a strictly philosophical stance – that a real method of phenomenological sociology can be developed to move into specific fields of investigation. This method could become a tool in its own right for sociology.

The strength of this sociological approach lies in its potential openness and theoretical creativity. What matters here is the heuristic model itself. Acknowledging the reflexive and quasi-scientific skills of social actors, it allows us to abstract *the intentional relationships they have with the world and with others and how, in doing so, they actively participate in the transformation of the world by choosing to relate to it in one way rather than another.*

We can thus conclude that Scheler had in his own way already pointed out a way of *being in the world* opposed to capitalism, a state of mind supported by an ecological intentionality which is at the same time universal sympathy. It is in this respect that the second-degree constructions of sociology are legitimate: they give clarity and intelligibility to people’s states of mind, which stem from their culture and past, and are lodged in their natural attitude, rather than being a property of from face-to-face relationships. As McCune summarises, in his powerful critique of modernity and capitalism, “[Scheler] claimed that moderns suffer more in the midst of technological advancement, their values are set by an ‘ethos of industrialization’, and they have no unified vision of who they are. The consequences have been devastating, including a lack of balanced living and ecological estrangement. In pointing beyond modernism, Scheler called for establishing personal, collective, and environmental harmony” (McCune 2014, p.50). His phenomenology of intentional frames of mind, understood a socialized intentionality that can be coloured by sympathy and love oriented towards all living beings, is a helpful method for a form of ecological sociology that has recognised the urgency of a respectful and “deeper connection

to the non-human world” (p.50). Thus Scheler largely prefigured the fashionable stream of French sociology embodied by Bruno Latour (2017). The method of this Latourian approach to sociology, which introduced non-human and “natural beings” into society, is therefore maybe not as new and revolutionary as often claimed.

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