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Gooch - The Epistemic Status of Value-Cognition - JCRT 3.1

The following paper was written in response to a call for papers addressing "The Role of the Emotions in Religious Reasoning," and was presented to the Philosophy of Religion Group of the American Academy of Religion in Nashville, Tennessee on November 21, 2000. Whatever else might be said about it, Scheler's treatment of this theme is among the most original to have been articulated by any major twentieth-century philosopher. The paper is divided into two parts. The first part examines Scheler's views on religion in relation to his broader philosophical project. The second part seeks to determine the epistemological significance of Scheler's phenomenological analysis of "the religious act." When the dust from that frequently exhilarating analysis has settled, what reasons, if any, has Scheler given us for supposing that any religious beliefs are true, or that someone might reasonably give her assent to them?

Part I

Scheler's main work in the philosophy of religion is *On the Eternal in Man*, and in this paper I will be primarily concerned with the theory of religious acts of consciousness developed in that work.¹ However, this theory is best understood in relation to arguments found in Scheler's earlier writings, especially *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Value*, where Scheler criticizes a number of presuppositions underlying Kant's moral philosophy, and lays the foundation for his own ethics of value (*Wertethik*).² It may be recalled that Kant had rejected teleological ethics on the grounds that all attempts to define moral obligation in terms of a particular good or end are contingent upon the inclinations of some individual or group. Because inclinations are subjective mental states, contingent upon the empirical constitution of the people who have them, they are incapable of yielding a universal moral principle, binding for all rational beings. Kant is thus led to propose a definition of the good only after he has defined duty, which he takes to be the conformity of the will of a rational being to a formal law determined by reason, without reference to any specific of good or end. "An absolutely good will, whose principle must be a categorical imperative, will therefore be indeterminate as regards all objects and will contain merely the form of willing; and indeed that form is autonomy."³

4. Although Scheler follows Kant in rejecting the possibility of an empirical or inductive ethics, he does not conclude, as Kant had done, that the only alternative is a formal one. That Kant did draw this conclusion, Scheler argues, results from his having equated the material with the empirical and the formal with the a priori. But Scheler regards this assumption as having been refuted by phenomenological research, which has shown that the a priori is not a synthetic structure imposed on sensation by the understanding, but a structure that is intuited along

¹Tr. Bernard Noble (New York: Harpers, 1960). Hereafter cited as "EM." Throughout this paper, I will refer to Scheler's works by the titles of the available English translations. In some cases, however, I have amended these translations. Frequently cited works are indicated in the text in parentheses. Where only one page number is indicated, that number always refers to the standard English translation. Where two pages are indicated, the first refers to the English translation, and the second to the corresponding German original as found in Scheler's *Gesammelte Werke*, 15 vols., ed. Maria Scheler and Manfred Frings (Bern: Francke, 1954-1985; Bonn: Bouvier, 1987-1997), in this case, *Vom Ewigen im Menschen* (GW 5).

²Tr. Manfred S. Frings and Roger L. Funk (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973). Hereafter cited as "FE." This is a translation of *Formalismus in der Ethik und die materiale Wertethik* (GW 2). Also important in this connection is Scheler's analysis of love in *The Nature of Sympathy*, tr. W. Stark (Hamden, CT: Archon, 1970) = *Wesen und Formen der Sympathie* (GW 7).

³Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, 3rd ed., tr. James W. Ellington (Indianapolis/ Cambridge: Hackett, 1993), p. 48.

with the contents of empirical experience, and apart from which no empirical experience would be possible. As a result of his failure to make a distinction between the formal and the a priori, Scheler claims, Kant makes unintelligible his own recognition that “the moral law is given as a fact of pure reason of which we are a priori conscious, and which is apodictically certain.”⁴ For, having equated the formal and the a priori, on what basis is it possible for Kant to distinguish between a “fact of pure reason” and a psychological fact? While Scheler agrees with Kant that ethics must be founded on a priori knowledge, by refusing to identify the a priori with the formal, he is able to argue for an ethics of value that is both a priori and non-formal, i.e., a “*materiale Wertethik*.”

5. Scheler’s conception of the material a priori, which is influenced by Husserl’s discussion of categorical intuition in the sixth book of the *Logical Investigations*, lies at the very heart of his theory of value, and of his philosophical method generally. By examining this conception more closely, we will be in a better position to grasp the claims entailed in his analysis of the religious act. Rather than conceiving the distinction between the empirical and the a priori as a distinction between experience and the conditions of experience, Scheler conceives it as a distinction between two different *kinds* of experience: the experience of empirical facts and the experience of “pure” or “phenomenological” facts. Thus, a priori knowledge, no less than empirical knowledge, is knowledge of facts, but the latter are facts of a different order than the former. What distinguishes “pure” facts from empirical facts is that they are logically prior to all empirical observation or induction. “In all non-phenomenological experience the pure facts of intuition and their interrelations function, we can say, as ‘structures’ and ‘formal laws’ in the sense that they are *never* ‘given’ in non-phenomenological experience” (FE 52).

[I]t is a *criterion* of the *essentialness* of a given content that it must already be *intuited* in the attempt to ‘*observe*’ it, in order to give the observation the desired or presupposed *direction*; and it is a criterion of ‘*essential interrelations*’ that . . . in attempting to find such interrelations through an increasing number of observations, we always presuppose the interrelations in the way in which we let one observation follow another [FE 50].

On this view, phenomenological analysis yields a priori knowledge insofar as it discloses the foundational order of intentional acts the fulfillment (*Vollziehung*) of which is already presupposed by empirical observation. Phenomenology radicalizes empiricism insofar as it succeeds in showing that the availability of the contents of sensation from which the empiricist account of experience “naively” takes its starting point logically entails the prior fulfillment of a series of distinct acts of consciousness, each of which is founded upon, or assumes the prior completion of, the previous one. This logical structure of experience remains implicit or “unthematized” (to borrow a word from Heidegger) as long as we remain within the “natural attitude,” and only becomes evident when that attitude itself becomes the object of reflection through the phenomenological reduction.

6. These claims had been formulated by Husserl, before Scheler established himself as a leader in the phenomenological movement, with the publication of *Formalism in Ethics*. The novelty

⁴Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*, ed. by Wilhelm Weischedel (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1974), p. 161. Lewis White Beck translates the phrase, “ein Faktum der reinen Vernunft, dessen wir uns a priori bewußt sind und welches apodiktisch gewiß ist” as “an apodictically certain fact, as it were, or pure reason, a fact of which we are a priori conscious.” I have chosen to retain the construction, “fact of pure reason,” which is present in the original, and to which Scheler’s remarks refer. Cf. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 3rd ed, tr. Lewis White Beck (New York: Macmillan, 1993), p. 48.

of Scheler's thought lies in his attempt to apply these insights to the problems of ethics, value-theory, and the philosophy of religion. As Scheler tersely asserts in his chapter on the a priori in *Formalism in Ethics*, "Whatever is valid in theoretical areas is valid in terms of far-reaching analogy for *values* and *willing*" (FE 60). It may be helpful to think of Scheler's philosophy as a whole as an attempt to explore the implications of this analogy (more or less) systematically.

7. Although I am not aware that Scheler ever says so directly, it appears that he intended to develop a critique of "psychologism" in relation to the emotions analogous to the critique of psychologism in logic contained in Husserl's epochal prolegomena to the *Logical Investigations*. In short, Scheler's thesis contains intentional acts of feeling, including the feeling of value-qualities, as well as acts of loving and hating, which are not properly conceived as subjective mental states because they are governed by rules that no more depend upon the psychophysical organization of human beings than do the rules of valid thinking (FE 254).⁵ By means of a novel appropriation of Pascal's notion of the *ordre* or *logique du coeur* (logic of the heart), Scheler argues that these acts exhibit a lawfulness just as valid in its own right as the lawfulness of logical relations. This lawfulness is not based on generalizations drawn from the observation of psychological facts. It is an a priori lawfulness; and it is this a priori structure that makes feeling-acts suitable candidates for phenomenological investigation.

In all of the areas that it undertakes to investigate, phenomenology has to distinguish three kinds of essential interrelations: 1) the essences (and their interrelations) of the *qualities* and other *contents of things* given in acts (thing-phenomenology); 2) the essences of *acts themselves* and their interrelations and orders of foundation (phenomenology of acts or foundational orders); and 3) the essential interrelations *between essences of acts and things* (e.g., values are given in feeling, colors in seeing, sounds in hearing, etc.) [FE 71-72].⁶

Scheler's attempt to develop a phenomenology of emotional life reflects his dissatisfaction with the treatment of alogical or non-rational levels of experience in the modern philosophical tradition. Scheler distinguishes two basic tendencies in the treatment of the emotions within that tradition. Rationalists like Descartes, Spinoza and Leibniz recognize a sort of intentionality in acts of feeling, but they do not acknowledge a distinct class of objects to which these acts are related. Instead, they hold that the same content apprehended by feeling in a confused or obscure manner may be clearly grasped by the understanding. For example, Scheler observes, according to Leibniz, "maternal love is a confused conception of the fact that it is good to love one's child" (FE 262). While the empiricists resist this kind of intellectualization of

⁵One might well ask whether the analogy employed by Scheler is legitimate. The point of Husserl's critique of psychologism is that no empirical law based on the observation of psychological facts is able to determine whether a particular inference is logically valid. As a normative discipline, logic is categorically distinct from the empirical sciences, including psychology. Thus, the distinction between logic and psychology turns on the issue of validity. But is a similar distinction applicable where feelings are concerned? In other words, are acts of feeling either valid or invalid in the same way that acts of thinking are? As we shall see, Scheler admits the possibility of acts of feeling involving deception in a manner similar to the manner in which acts of perception may involve deception. It is not entirely clear, however, how illusory contents of feeling-acts are to be distinguished from "real" ones.

⁶"Nun hat die Phänomenologie auf allen Gebieten, die sie ihrer Untersuchung unterzieht, drei Arten von Wesenszusammenhängen zu scheiden: 1) die Wesenheiten (und ihre Zusammenhänge) der in den Akten gegebenen *Qualitäten* und sonstigen *Sachgehalte* (Sachphänomenologie); 2) die Wesenheiten der *Akte selbst* und die zwischen ihnen bestehenden Zusammenhänge und Fundierungen (Akt- oder Ursprungs-phänomenologie); 3) die Wesenszusammenhänge *zwischen* Akt- und *Sachwesenheiten* (z.B. daß Werte nur im Fühlen gegeben sind; Farben nur im Sehen, Töne im Hören usw.)" (GW 2:92).

the emotions, they simultaneously abandon the recognition that feelings are intentional acts directed toward a content of some kind. Instead, the British moral psychologists regard feelings as mental states that are suitable objects of psychological description and causal explanation, but do not perform any cognitive function.⁷ Since today our primary concern is the role of the emotions in religious reasoning, it is worth noting here that Scheler regards the psychological assumptions common to empiricism and Kantianism alike as “the greatest obstacles in the way of a philosophy of religion” (EM 256), by which he appears to mean that one does justice to the phenomenological facts of religious experience and the intentional structure of religious consciousness.

8. What Scheler objects to above all in the sensualist psychology common to empiricism and Kantianism is the relegation of the whole of emotional life to the faculty of sensibility. This, he argues, involves an unquestioned assumption that reason and sensibility are the only two sources of human knowledge, and that, feelings, because they are not subject to logical rules, must be treated merely as psychological facts. “According to this division, *everything* in the mind which is alogical, e.g., intuition, feeling, striving, loving, hating, is dependent on man’s *psychophysical organization*” (FE 253-54). This assumption, in Scheler’s view, has prevented the recognition of the noetic structure of emotional experience. To say that emotional experience has a noetic structure is to say that feelings are, at least in some cases, not merely psychological facts or mental states, but acts of consciousness with intentional correlates.
9. An important step in Scheler’s application of the concept of intentionality to the emotions is the distinction that he introduces between *Fühlen* and *Gefühl*, both of which are generally translated as “feeling.” In Scheler’s use of these terms, the infinitive “*Fühlen*” refers to the act of feeling something, whereas “*Gefühl*” refers to a feeling-state that is apprehended through an act of feeling. Part of Scheler’s justification for this distinction is that the same feeling-state can be the object of different feeling-acts without itself undergoing any change. For example, the same pain can be variously suffered, tolerated, endured or merely noticed without any change occurring in the state of pain itself (FE 256). Conversely, in his discussion of love, Scheler observes, “Our love for someone does not alter, for all the pain and grief the loved one may cause us, nor our hatred, for all the joy and pleasure the hated one may afford” (NS 147). This goes to show that, for Scheler, feeling-states (such as joy, pleasure and pain) and feelings as acts of consciousness directed toward an intentional correlate of some kind are independent variables that must not to be confused. In a footnote in *Formalism in Ethics* (FM 257/271) Scheler identifies three different classes of objects that are apprehended through acts of feeling: 1) feeling-states, including pain and (presumably) emotions like anger and sadness; 2) felt qualities of objects, which are themselves neither feelings nor values (Scheler’s examples include the serenity of the sky or the sadness of a landscape); and 3) values like agreeableness, beauty and goodness. According to Scheler, acts of feeling directed toward the third class of objects (i.e., values) exhibit a cognitive function in addition to their being intentional.
10. Although Scheler does not specify the meaning of “cognitive function,” the following examples may help to clarify the distinction that Scheler appears to have in mind. Suppose I find myself feeling sad without being aware at the moment of the cause of my sadness. The sadness that I feel is a mental state (a *Gefühl*) apprehended through an act of feeling (*Fühlen*). The sadness

⁷Cf. the preface to the second edition of *The Nature of Sympathy*, where Scheler refers to the “deep-seated errors . . . [of] Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, David Hume, Adam Smith, Herbert Spencer, Alexander Bain and others” (SN xlvii).

is not itself an act of feeling, but is the content or object of such an act. I may go on to ask myself, "Why am I suddenly feeling so sad?" Suppose that, upon reflection, I remember some disappointing event, which I then identify as the cause of my sadness. The event then becomes the intentional object of an act of remembering, and, through a further act of inference, it is identified as the cause of my feeling of sadness. Or suppose I begin to notice a feeling of discomfort in my throat that I recognize as the first stage of a cold. In this case, the feeling of discomfort in my throat functions as a symptom or token of an illness that now becomes the object of my expectation. In each of these cases, a feeling state (sadness or a pain in my throat) is related to an event or object that is distinct from it (a memory or an incipient cold), but the relationship in each case is a *mediate* one, insofar as the association involves an act of inference through which the memory is identified as the cause of my sadness or the discomfort in my throat is identified as the symptom of a cold.

11. Contrast these cases with the following ones: I bite into a chocolate and discover to my delight that it is *not* filled with cherry syrup, as I had feared, but with delicious caramel nougat. I become aware of the agreeableness of the taste even before I ascertain that the nougat is the source of this agreeable sensation. Or, as I sit at my desk after having struggled to commit an elusive thought to the page, I find myself marveling at the beauty of a sound that I only subsequently recognize as the song of a bird singing outside my window. Or, passing from a busy street into the twilight of an ancient cathedral I am struck by the numinous serenity of the sanctuary, without having identified my sense of this quality with any particular perceivable feature. In these cases, a value-content of some kind (the agreeableness of a particular taste, the beauty of a particular sound, the sanctity of a particular space) is the immediate object of an act of feeling. Moreover, in each of these examples, the awareness of a value *precedes* the awareness of the object that is the bearer of the value. To use Scheler's manner of speaking, *Werterkenntnis* or the cognition of a value (deliciousness, beauty, or solemnity) is phenomenologically *priori* to *Seinserkenntnis* or the cognition of the object that is the bearer of value. Here, "feeling has the same relation to its value-correlate as 'representing' has to its 'object,' namely, an intentional relation. It is not *externally brought together* with an object . . . On the contrary, feeling *originally* intends its *own* kind of objects, namely, 'values' " (FE 258).
12. In choosing to classify values as qualities that are apprehended through feeling-acts, Scheler rejects the view, apparently held by Kant, that predications of value result from judgments determined by a feeling of pleasure or displeasure experienced in relation to some object. Although Scheler holds that values, as qualities of objects, are apprehended through acts of feeling, he firmly rejects the view that values are reducible to feeling-states or that attributions of value refer to the power of an object to produce a feeling of pleasure or displeasure. Once again, Scheler employs an analogy between values and colors: "A value-quality is no more a feeling-state or a relation to one or merely the (unknown) X of a feeling than the quality 'blue' is a visual sensation or a relation to a sensible state or an unknown X of a specific visual act" (FE 243). Because Kant conceives of feeling in terms of pleasure and displeasure, making no qualitative distinctions between different kinds of feelings (with the notable exception of the feeling of respect [*Achtung*] for the moral law), and because he regards feelings as empirically determined events, he is led to conclude that all forms of emotive ethics are hedonistic and therefore incapable of producing a universal criterion of moral value.
13. Scheler contends that, as qualities of things, values are capable of being distinguished from the particular things in which they appear. Just as I can bring to givenness a red color as a

mere extensive quale, e.g., as a pure color of the spectrum, without regarding it as covering a corporeal surface or as something spatial, so also are such *values* as agreeable, charming, lovely, friendly, distinguished and noble in principle accessible to me without my having to represent them as properties belonging to things or people [FE 12]. By drawing a distinction between values and things, people and the events in which they appear, Scheler is able to argue that values themselves, and the essential interrelations that they exhibit, are not subject to change, even though the particular goods that are the bearers (*Träger*) of values are. For example, as a value-quality, beauty is not affected by additions or subtractions to the sum total of beautiful objects in the world. Nor are the values of honesty or friendship affected when someone tells a lie or betrays a friend. Similarly, agreeableness, nobility, and holiness, considered in themselves, possess essential features that remain constant, regardless of the particular objects, actions or people in which these qualities are recognized by different individuals and groups in various times and places. The possibility of identifying essential interrelations and a foundational order among acts of feeling and the objects to which they are related leads Scheler to propose “an *emotive apriorism* as a definite necessity, and [to] demand a new division of the false unity of apriorism and rationalism that has hitherto existed” (FE 65).

14. Among the a priori claims that Scheler makes for values are that they are always either positive or negative (FE 81); that the existence of a positive value is itself a positive value and vice versa (FE 82); and that certain values are only capable of being borne by, or appearing in, certain kinds of things. For example, only a *person* can be morally good or evil (FE 85). Acts of feeling of values are governed by laws analogous to the law of non-contradiction in logic. For example, Scheler observes, “It is an evident proposition that we cannot at the same time *desire* and *despise* the *same* value complex” (FE 84). Probably the most controversial claim that Scheler makes about values is that it is possible to identify an a priori hierarchy (*Rangordnung*) among them, which is determined by the essences of values themselves, independently of our knowledge of them. This order is reflected in the fact that “higher” values are a priori preferable to “lower” ones. This claim may appear to be circular, since “because it is preferable” is just as unsatisfactory an explanation for A’s being of higher value than B than “because of its sleep-inducing quality” is for a potion’s being soporific (Racine)! But it is important to bear in mind that the issue here is not the relative value of two different valuable *things*, but the relative “height” of two different *values*. The order of preference does not apply to the particular goods (i.e., valuable things) that are preferred, but to the values themselves. Although we have no trouble understanding someone who says, “I find reading far more pleasurable than jogging. Which do you prefer?” the same is not true of someone who says, “I prefer what is agreeable to what is disagreeable. How about you?” Furthermore, Scheler argues, considered within itself, the noble is preferable to the agreeable, regardless of which particular actions are thought to exhibit nobility or expected to produce an agreeable sensation. Thus, the a priori relationships among values are not subject, as Kant had supposed, to the vicissitudes of history, even though the “rules of preferring” some goods to others are (FE 88).
15. It is also important to recognize that Scheler distinguishes preferring from choosing and all other acts of conation (FE 87). Higher values are not higher *because* we choose them over lower ones. Rather, their relative “height” is given in an act of preference that precedes any act of conation, which is to say that Scheler grants phenomenological priority to the act of preferring in the foundational order of acts involved in the experience of something-as-valuable. We are not confronted first with a selection of already given values amongst which we then determine our preferences, “as though preferring were ‘added’ to the values comprehended in a primary

intention of feeling as only a secondary act" (FE 89). An act of preference must already have occurred in order for us to be able to choose. Furthermore, acts of preference are not logically deduced from, or explicable in terms of, rational principles. They are based instead on an "an intuitive 'evidence of preference'" (FE 90). Thus, "the structure of preferring and placing after circumscribes the value-qualities that we feel" (FE 89). Rather than preferring one value to another *because* it is "higher," it is only in the act of preferring that we learn to distinguish "higher" values from "lower" ones, i.e., not "I prefer this value because it is higher," but "I recognize that this value is higher because I prefer it." Scheler recognizes the possibility that one may be deceived in one's value-preferences. For example, one might regard what is pleasurable as being intrinsically more valuable than what is just, although in the objective order of things, justice is to be preferred to pleasure. It is this sense that Scheler acknowledges the truth of the Socratic dictum that "all evil willing rests on moral deception and aberration" (FE 69). However, this raises a problem that Scheler fails to address, since, if the *a priori* order of values rests on "an intuitive evidence of preference," then Scheler must produce some standard for distinguishing between good evidence and bad evidence. In other words, if evil willing results from a deception of feeling, then there must be some way to distinguish cases in which our feeling is deceived from cases in which it is not; and it is not immediately apparent that feeling itself could furnish such a criterion.

16. In addition to his appeal to "intuitive evidence," Scheler also identifies a number of essential interrelations (*Wesenszusammenhänge*) between the relative height of values and certain other factors. For example, values are higher the more they endure. As William James remarks in a different, though related, context, "the best things are the more eternal things."⁸ Scheler appeals to the grammar of the word "love" in order to illustrate this point (FE 91-92). While it makes sense to say "I experienced extreme pleasure for ten minutes this morning," it sounds rather odd to say "I loved you deeply for ten minutes this morning" or "I am loving you deeply at this moment." The truer love is, the more it endures. Similarly, the higher a value is, the less it is subject to scarcity and divisibility. While only a few people are able to enjoy the pleasure of a scrumptious meal, there is in principle no limit to the number of people who may appreciate a beautiful work of art.
17. One of the criteria employed by Scheler for distinguishing between the relative height of different values is the depth of contentment experienced in relation to each. Here he makes a distinction between satisfaction (*Befriedigung*) and pleasure. The German word, *Befriedigung*, connotes the satisfaction or fulfillment of a specific need, wish or desire. Scheler argues that, although *Befriedigung* may be a cause of pleasure, its depth is not a function of the degree of pleasure. Scheler defines *Befriedigung* as "an experience of fulfillment. It only arises where an intention toward a value is fulfilled through the appearance of that value" (FE 96). This seems to imply that a particular need, wish or desire is only capable of being fulfilled by the specific kind of value toward which it is directed – an implication that will become important when we come to consider whether religious needs, wishes and desires, and the satisfaction at which they aim, are capable of being explained in terms of non-religious factors. "The satisfaction in feeling one value is deeper than the satisfaction in feeling another value if the former proves to be *independent* of the latter while the latter remains dependent on the former" (FE 96). Thus, the "lower values" are able to be more fully appreciated and enjoyed the more contentment has been realized in relation to the "higher" values. The restless seeking of

⁸William James, "The Will to Believe," *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1897), p. 25.

gratification through the enjoyment of goods that are the bearers of “lower” values is often a symptom of discontent in relation to higher ones. Here, no doubt, we detect the trace of the famous words, addressed to God, from the opening lines of Augustine’s *Confessions*, “our hearts find no peace until they rest in you.”

18. The primary purpose of this paper is to explore the epistemological implications of Scheler’s theory of religious acts, and at present I am only interested in those aspects of his theory of value-cognition that are important for understanding his approach to the philosophy of religion. It is worth noting at this point that Scheler’s non-formal ethics of value is intended not only as a response to Kant’s ethical formalism, but also to Nietzsche’s interpretation of morality as a symptom of declining vitality and *ressentiment*. Although Scheler recognizes life-values or vital values as a distinct value-modality, he recognizes in addition several higher orders of value, which he claims are not capable of being understood in terms of vital interests alone. Scheler shares Nietzsche’s rejection of humanism, but he draws from it the opposite conclusion. Whereas, for Nietzsche, “man” (*der Mensch*) is only a crossing-over (*ein Übergang*) to the Overman, for Scheler, he is “only the movement, the *tendency*, the *crossing-over* (*Übergang*) to the *divine*” (FE 288/302).⁹ It is in this elevation of his gaze beyond himself, and toward the eternal, that Scheler locates the essence of man, although the biological species *homo sapiens* is only one possible realization of this essence. “[Man] is, rather, according to his essence, only the living X of this seeking, which, viewed in relation to all possible psychophysical organizations, must be thought of as completely *variable*, so that the organization of this factual, earthly man presents only *one* actualized possibility, to which this X affords infinite latitude” [FE 292/306-06].
19. In identifying the essence of the human with a tendency toward the divine, Scheler does not presuppose any particular idea of the divinity, but only “the *quality* of the divine, or the *quality* of the holy” (FE 292) as such, which has been associated historically with a variety of different positive representations of God or the gods. Just as, in Scheler’s view, other value-qualities are capable of being distinguished from the particular goods in which they appear, so is the value-quality of the holy capable of being distinguished from the particular beings in which it has been recognized. While it is not the task of the phenomenologist, but rather the psychologist and historian of religion, to catalogue and compare the different ways in which the divine has been experienced in the course of history, and to classify the objects that have been regarded as holy by different individuals and groups, insofar as the holy constitutes a distinct value-modality, it is the task of a phenomenology of values to describe its essential features.

*Here, however, everything depends on the fact that there is an *a priori* value-idea of the “divine” that is completely independent of these sources of positive religious knowledge, and even more independent of the colorations that the individual characteristic features and historical forms of life of different peoples contribute to the determination of positive religious representations, [and] which does not presuppose any historical experience or inductive experience . . .* [FE 293/307].

In maintaining that there is such an “*a priori* value-idea of the divine,” Scheler claims to be appropriating “the core of truth contained in [a] philosophico-religious line of thought which

⁹Cf. *Also sprach Zarathustra*, Part IV, “Vom höheren Menschen.”

dates back to the time of Augustine" (FE 293).¹⁰ Later, in the introduction to his main work in the philosophy of religion, Scheler expresses his interest in "deliver[ing] the kernel of Augustinianism from the husklike accretions of history and employ[ing] phenomenological philosophy to provide it with a fresh and more deeply rooted foundation" (EM 13). In attempting to characterize the strategy underlying Scheler's approach to the philosophy of religion, it may be helpful to contrast that approach with two alternatives that Scheler rejects.

20. The first of these is the approach, influential among Protestant theologians in Germany around the turn of the twentieth century, which sought, by means of a broadly conceived investigation of the psychology and history of religion, to demonstrate that religion constitutes an autonomous domain of human experience alongside the scientific, the ethical and the aesthetic. These Protestant theologians (among them Ernst Troeltsch and Rudolf Otto) took their point of departure from Kant and Schleiermacher, the latter of whom had sought to establish the autonomy of religion by identifying it with "the feeling of absolute dependence." The strength of this approach, in Scheler's view, is that it recognizes the distinctiveness of religious experience, and succeeds in distinguishing religion from metaphysics. Its weakness is its subjectivism. By identifying religion with feeling, and by conceiving feeling as a subjective mental state, this approach abandons the claim of religion to involve knowledge of extra-mental features of reality. In contrast to the psychology of religion from which this approach takes its point of departure, the phenomenology of religion proposed by Scheler is concerned not with psychological facts, but with the noetic structure of religious acts. Its attention is directed, in the first place, to the phenomenological essence or "regional ontology" of the objects given in those acts, and, secondarily, to the acts in which those objects are given. "What occurs psychologically – that is, what is observable through introspection – in a person at prayer, and how it occurs, is just as irrelevant to the nature (*Wesen*) of the act of prayer, as the indigestion or daydreams (*Phantasiebilder*) of a mathematician, as he thinks about a problem, is to the noetics of mathematics" (EM 154-55/151).
21. The second alternative rejected by Scheler is the Thomistic tradition of natural theology, which attempts to derive knowledge of God from non-religious facts about the world, for example, by means of the cosmological argument for the existence of God. The strength of this approach, in Scheler's view, is that, in contrast to the Protestant theology of feeling, it maintains the claim to objectivity of religious knowledge. Its weakness is that it threatens to collapse the distinction between metaphysics and religion. Although the God of metaphysics may ultimately be shown to be identical with the God of religion, the kind of act in which each of these objects is given, respectively, is entirely different. Metaphysics is concerned with being. The metaphysical impulse originates in the sense of wonder that anything exists at all, and the aim of metaphysics is to obtain knowledge of the necessary being or *Weltgrund* that is the cause of all contingent being. To the degree that metaphysics is successful, the knowledge at which it arrives is a result of the activity of thinking. In contrast to metaphysics, religion is

¹⁰Specifically, the tradition to which Scheler refers is the one that in the nineteenth century came to be called "ontologism." The most famous representative of this tradition in modern philosophy is Malebranche, whose *De la recherche de la vérité* (1674-75) develops an original synthesis of Augustinian and Cartesian lines of thought. Malebranche's theory of "vision in God" proposes a solution to the ontological status of ideas of sensible qualities, which he locates in the divine substance, so that "the ideas we immediately perceive are the ideas, or archetypes, of objects in the mind of God." Willis Doney, "Malebranche, Nicolas," *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Vol. V, ed. by Paul Edwards (New York: Macmillan, 1967), p. 141. Although Scheler explicitly rejects several views associated with ontologism, he is clearly interested in reclaiming its recognition of "the fact that there is an ultimate element of an immediate and intuitable nature in all religious object-ideas" (FE 294).

concerned primarily with salvation (*Heil*) and the means of salvation, which is apprehended through the act of faith. “The *summum bonum*, not the absolutely real and its essence, is the *first* intentional object of the religious act” (EM 138/134). To the degree that religion involves knowledge, that knowledge is not extrapolated, inferred or abstracted. It is received passively, in a manner similar to the one in which the qualities of sensible objects are received through perception. Thus, even if the First Cause discovered by the metaphysician should turn out in the end to be the same as the personal Creator and Redeemer of the world who is the object of religious faith, no metaphysical proposition is capable of guaranteeing the truth of those propositions which appeal to evidence that only becomes available in the religious act.

22. The manner in which Scheler understands the relationship between metaphysics and religion leads him to re-conceive the distinction between natural and revealed theology. For Scheler, what distinguishes natural theology from revealed theology is *not* that the latter appeals to revelation while the former relies on reason alone. Rather, natural theology *too* is founded on revelation, although here we do not have to do with the revelation of any particular religious tradition (i.e., positive revelation). The point is that natural theology does not begin with value-free facts, but with religiously significant ones. But whereas the evidence to which revealed theology appeals has its source in the self-communication of a divine being mediated through human representatives, the evidence to which natural theology appeals does not.
23. As I have already mentioned, in Scheler’s view, phenomenology is concerned with 1) the essences of qualities given in acts, 2) the essential interrelations between different orders of acts, and 3) the essential interrelations between acts and their intentional objects. I want now to consider how this understanding of phenomenology is reflected in Scheler’s approach to the philosophy of religion. To begin with, it is important to note that Scheler draws a strict distinction between “the essential phenomenology of religion” and several other disciplines with which he does not want it to be confused, including metaphysics, natural theology, epistemology (*Erkenntnistheorie*), explanatory and descriptive psychology, as well as the concrete phenomenology of religion (EM 156), which is concerned with the descriptive analysis of individual religious traditions. The essential phenomenology of religion provides the ultimate philosophical foundation for each of these other disciplines. Its task is to investigate what Scheler calls the “logical sense” (*Sinnlogik*) of religious acts – the “laws of acts that are immanent to *religious* reason” (EM 157). The assumption that seems to motivate Scheler’s phenomenology of religious acts and their intentional correlates is that “By re-performing, in reflective intuition, the acts in which God is . . . given to the religious believer, the phenomenologist may arrive at an intuition of the *a priori* order in which God is cognized.”¹¹ Scheler seeks, in other words, to retrace the steps that religious consciousness takes in arriving at cognition of God. Specifically, he aims 1) to identify the essential features of the divine (*das Göttliche*), 2) to distinguish the various manners in which the divine is revealed, 3) and to analyze the religious act “through which man prepares himself to receive the content of revelation, and through which he seizes it in faith” (EM 161/157).
24. Despite the diversity of its historical manifestations, the essence of the divine exhibits two formal features that are constitutive of its essence. “It ‘is’ absolutely and it is holy” (EM 163/159). Let us examine each of these separately. To begin with, the religious act always intends something that transcends the world. The divine is always encountered as belonging

¹¹Eugene Kelly, *Max Scheler* (Boston: Twayne 1977), p. 165. Kelly’s book is in my view the most helpful concise introduction to Scheler’s thought available in English.

to a qualitatively superior (*überlegen*) order of being in relation to which human being, as part of the created order, is experienced as radically contingent and relative. However, the location of the divine in an absolute order of being does not result from a metaphysical inference from contingent to necessary being, as in the case of the cosmological proof. Insofar as a mundane object may serve as an occasion for the apprehension of the divine in a religious act, it does not function as a fact (e.g., that contingent beings exist) from which an inference is drawn (e.g., that a necessary being exists), but rather as a symbol or icon. Unlike the metaphysical inference from effect to cause, the *religious* apprehension of the divine is more akin to the apprehension of the spirit of the artist that “shines through” a work of art. “Certainly the artist is *also* the cause of his work. But in addition it contains *phenomenally* something of the individual spiritual nature of the artist; it mirrors him, his spirit lives in it, is present to us in the work” (EM 166/162). Similarly, Scheler suggests, the presence of the divine is apprehended in the natural religious act as something visibly evident in the created order. Rather than being inferred from the existence of the natural world, nature is recognized as a vehicle through which the divine is expressed. “In various ways – which correspond in part to the sublimity and purity of the religion, in part to the different attributes of God – ‘God expresses himself’ in the events of nature, indeed the whole of nature is the *field of his expression* – just as joy and sadness are expressed on a human face in the act of smiling or in tears” (EM 165/162).

25. In addition to belonging to an absolute order of being, categorically distinct from the contingent, created order, the divine also belongs to an absolute order of value, categorically distinct from all relative values. Thus, insofar as the holy may be defined as absolute value, holiness is an essential feature of the divine. Furthermore, in the foundational order of religious acts, the cognition of value (*Werterkenntnis*) precedes the cognition of being (*Seinserkenntnis*). For religious reason, the divine is an object of reverence, adoration and love before it becomes an object of thought. In spite of the variety of shades that the holy is capable of assuming historically, as a distinct value-modality, it cannot be resolved into any other group of values.
26. Apart from the formal attributes of absolute being and absolute value, which alone “constitute and demarcate the region of objects of a religious form of consciousness – in contrast to all other objects of possible consciousness” (EM 173/169), Scheler discusses a number of non-formal attributes of the divine, including spirit, reason, will, love, mercy and omniscience. The predication of these positive attributes in each case draws upon some experience of the world or finite consciousness. The positive attributes are applied to the divine being through the principle of analogy. By virtue of their analogical nature, all positive attributes of God are necessarily inadequate (EM 176). This accounts for the prevalence of figurative imagery in religious language. Given the limitations of this paper, it will not be possible to examine the manner in which Scheler reconstructs the foundational order of acts involved in the attribution of positive attributes to the divine.
27. The intentional object of the religious act is a transcendent region of being and value, however that region may be conceived by individual historical subjects standing within concrete religious traditions. The act in which the religious object is intended is nevertheless an immanent act of consciousness, which, as such, can be subject to phenomenological analysis. The phenomenology of religious acts will succeed in distinguishing itself from the psychology of religion insofar as it succeeds in demonstrating that religious acts are not merely psychological facts, but intentional acts; that they do not involve merely “a random nexus of extra-religious intentions” (EM 247); that they do not depend upon the empirical constitution of human

beings per se, but belong rather to the constitution of finite consciousness as such; and that they manifest a distinctive noetic lawfulness (*Sinngesetzlichkeit*), which does not depend upon abstraction from psychological facts, and exhibits “strictly formulable conditions of *evident* fulfillment and non-fulfillment” (EM 247/242). Religious acts are just as constitutive of human consciousness as are acts of perception, memory, and judgment. They cannot be explained in terms of non-religious wishes, needs or desires, because such wishes, needs and desires are directed toward empirical, finite objects, whereas the religious act is directed toward a categorically different kind of object, namely, a divinity of some kind (whether or not any such object exist independently of the act of consciousness in which it is intended). Of course, it is possible to speak of religious needs, wishes and desires, but insofar as they are *religious*, they are directed to a religious object, and are therefore not capable of being reduced to or explained in terms of non-religious wishes, needs or desires.

28. Scheler identifies three criteria for distinguishing the religious act from all other acts of consciousness. To begin with, the religious act is distinguished by the world-transcending character of its intention. That intention is not capable of being fulfilled by any finite entity. The second criterion seems to be closely related to the first. It states that the intention of a religious act is only capable of being fulfilled by a divine object of some kind (i.e., one that possesses, as a minimum, the formal attributes of the essence of the divine indicated above). The religious act always intends a being or value that is different from every finite being or relative value. So, for example, religious hope and fear are categorically different from, and unintelligible in terms of, mundane hopes and fears. The happiness that is sought in the religious act is one that could not conceivably result from any degree of human progress, or from the multiplication of other sources of happiness. “Thus, in each one of these acts – praise, thanks, fear, hope, love, happiness, seeking, striving for perfection, indictment, judgment, forgiveness, wonder, veneration, petition, worship – our mind *oversteps* the bounds not only of this or that one finite thing, but of the essential content of finite things as such” (EM 252-53//247). The third criterion that distinguishes the religious act is that its fulfillment involves “the apprehension of an *entity* of a divine nature, which is *self-revealing*, and which *discloses itself* to man” [*die Aufnahme eines sich selber erschliessenden, dem Menschen sich hingebenden Seinden göttlichen Characters*]. The religious act, in other words, is essentially passive or receptive. The divine is never something that is produced or discovered as a result of some activity of the mind. It is always encountered or received. “Where the soul does not touch God – by whatever means – and touch Him in such a way that it knows and feels itself touched by God, there is no *religious* relation – not even in the case of ‘natural’ religion” (EM 254/248).
29. While there is certainly more that might be said by way of explication of Scheler’s position, the preceding summary should suffice to allow me to raise the epistemological issues that are the primary concern of this paper, and it is to those issues that I now turn.

Part II

30. In the space that remains, I will assess Scheler’s contribution to the clarification of the role of the emotions in religious reasoning. I am especially interested in determining the extent to which Scheler’s theory of the religious act may contribute to the epistemic justification of religious belief, and what light it may have to shed on the epistemic status of religious faith.
31. In the Anglo-American philosophical tradition, the justification of belief has often been conceived in terms of sufficient evidence. A justified belief is one for which there is sufficient

evidence, and if we are to be epistemically responsible, we ought to withhold our assent from those beliefs for which we do not have sufficient evidence. In his essay, "The Ethics of Belief," W. K. Clifford famously argued, "It is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence."¹² A similar principle was formulated by Bertrand Russell in his *History of Western Philosophy*: "Give to any hypothesis which is worth your while to consider just that degree of credence which the evidence warrants."¹³ In what follows, I will refer to the principle that justified beliefs are those beliefs for which we have sufficient evidence as the principle of sufficient evidence, and I will refer to the person who argues that religious beliefs do not satisfy this principle, and that we ought therefore to withhold our assent from them, as an evidentialist. I will call a person who experiences genuinely religious inclinations a religiously inclined person or would-be believer. And I will attempt to determine whether Scheler's theory of the religious act might be used by the would-be believer in responding to the evidentialist's challenge.

32. There seem to be two main strategies that the would-be believer might adopt in attempting to develop a response to the evidentialist. The first strategy is to argue that religious belief is consistent with the principle of sufficient evidence. Those who adopt this strategy frequently argue that religious belief is justified on the basis of religious experience in a manner similar to the manner in which beliefs about the existence of physical objects are justified on the basis of perceptual experience. The second strategy is to concede that religious belief fails to satisfy the principle of sufficient evidence, but to argue that there are epistemic situations in which the principle of sufficient evidence does not apply. Typically these are situations where a decision of some kind is unavoidable even though sufficient evidence is not available, and the suspension of judgment is the practical equivalent of a decision. This is the strategy employed by William James in his response to Clifford in "The Will to Believe." In the following pages I will consider Scheler's theory of the religious act as it relates to each of these strategies.
33. Once, when asked by Leo Rosten what he would have to say for himself if he were confronted by God in the hereafter, Russell is said to have replied, "I would say, 'Sir, why did you not give me better evidence?' "¹⁴ If a justified religious belief is one for which there is sufficient evidence, then obviously it will be important to determine what would count as sufficient evidence to warrant such a belief. In the same conversation with Rosten, Russell indicated what kind of evidence might suffice to justify a belief in God:

I think that if I heard a voice from the sky predicting all that was going to happen to me during the next twenty-four hours, including events that would have seemed highly improbable, and if all these events then proceeded to happen, I might perhaps be convinced at least of the existence of some superhuman intelligence."¹⁵

Let us suppose that the evidence indicated by Russell were forthcoming, and that, as a result, Russell became convinced of the existence of some superhuman intelligence. Would it be correct to say in this case that Russell had become a religious believer? In other words, would it be correct to call Russell's belief in the existence of some superhuman intelligence a religious

¹²W. K. Clifford, "The Ethics of Belief," *Lectures and Essays*, vol. 2, ed. Leslie Stephens and Frederick Pollack (New York: Macmillan, 1901), p. 186.

¹³Bertrand Russell, *A History of Western Philosophy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1945), p. 816.

¹⁴Leo Rosten, "Bertrand Russell and God: A Memoir," *Saturday Review*, 1:12 (Feb. 23, 1974), p. 26.

¹⁵Bertrand Russell, "What is an Agnostic?," quoted here from *The Basic Writings of Bertrand Russell: 1903-1959*, ed. by Robert E. Egner and Lester E. Denonn (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1961), p. 584

belief? In light of the preceding discussion of Scheler's theory of religious acts, it is clear that his response to this question would be negative.

34. Perhaps the central claim of Scheler's philosophy of religion is that there is such a thing as *religious* reason, which manifests itself in acts of consciousness that exhibit a qualitatively unique kind of evidence, and a distinct foundational order of their own. Religious reason is in the first place value-cognition (*Werterkenntnis*). Unlike metaphysical reason, which is strictly concerned with the cognition of being (*Seinerkenntnis*), religious reason does not take its point of departure from value-neutral facts about "what is the case," but from religiously significant facts, i.e., events, persons, places, and things that are recognized as the bearers of religious value. So Scheler's response to Russell might go somewhat as follows: "The evidence that you require is available, but you have refused to consider it." In fact, in the preface to the second edition of *Vom Ewigen im Menschen*, Scheler says something very close to this in response to Ernst Troeltsch's charge that he had relied too heavily on the principle of self-evidence, and that those "who live in other circumstances or who have other types of character also know other kinds of self-evidence" (EM 22). Scheler writes:

. . . if the objection is made to us that what is self-evident to us is not so to 'other men,' it is of course quite *possible* that we are the prey to an *illusion* of self-evidence, for we do not contest the possibility of such illusions. . . . But it is no less deplorable if similar factors have blinded others to *intrinsically* manifest truths which at the same time we must suppose to be universally apprehensible [EM 24].

Scheler insists that religious reason is not merely wishful thinking, and he explicitly rejects the interpretation of Pascal's dictum, "*le coeur a ses raisons*," which takes Pascal to be saying that, when there is no intellectual basis for making a decision, then we are entitled to appeal to "the reasons of the heart," i.e., to allow our hopes, needs and wishes to determine our beliefs.¹⁶ That we wish or hope for something to be true, Scheler insists, has no bearing whatsoever on whether or not it is in fact true. Rather, Scheler takes Pascal's dictum to mean that "the heart," or feeling-acts, are themselves sources of evidence. The person who regards feelings merely as psychological facts, and fails to recognize the intentional structure of feeling-acts, "can never see what is revealed to us of the world, and of the value-content of the world *in* feeling, *in* preferring, *in* loving and hating, but instead sees only what we encounter in inner perception, i.e., in 'ideational' behavior, *when* we feel, *when* we prefer, *when* we love and hate, *when* we enjoy a work of art, *when* we pray to God" (FE 260/274). Acts of feeling, preferring, loving and hating, in Scheler's view, are a source of information about the world that is just as legitimate in its own right as the information we receive from sense perception.

A philosophy which fails to recognize and a priori denies the claim to transcendence which all non-logical acts make, or which allows this claim only in the case of acts of thought and those acts of intuitive cognition which furnish the material for thought in the domain of theory and science, condemns itself to blindness to whole realms of facts and their connections, for access to these realms is not essentially tied to acts of mind proper to the understanding. A philosophy of this sort is like a man who has healthy eyes and closes them and wants to perceive colors only with his ear or his nose!¹⁷

¹⁶Such an interpretation seems to underlie James' argument in "The Will to Believe."

¹⁷Max Scheler, "*Ordo Amoris*," in *Selected Philosophical Essays*, p. 122.

There are two issues here that need to be clearly distinguished. The first issue is whether or not one is willing to concede that there is a phenomenologically distinct “realm of facts and their connections” that are only given in religious acts. The second issue concerns the epistemic significance of these facts, if they exist.

35. Although in some places Scheler clearly recognizes a distinction between the phenomenological and epistemological claims entailed in his discussion of religious acts, he is not always careful to maintain this distinction, which results in a fundamental ambiguity that becomes apparent at several crucial points in his writings. The source of this ambiguity may be described as follows. For Scheler, as for Husserl, phenomenology is an eidetic science, which is to say that the knowledge it seeks is knowledge of essences, rather than knowledge of (empirical) facts. Phenomenology is concerned with the pure “whatness,” *Sosein* or essence of things, rather than with their “thatness,” *Dasein* or existence. As Husserl observes in the *Ideen*, “the positing . . . of essence does not imply in the least the positing of any individual existence whatever; pure essential truths do not involve the slightest assertion concerning facts; hence from them *alone* we are not able to infer even the most trivial factual truth.”¹⁸ In Husserl’s thought, this distinction is expressed in terms of the *epoche* or suspension of judgment concerning the factual existence of things as they are given in the natural attitude. This is not to say that there is no relation at all between facts and essences. As Scheler observes, “everything that holds true of the (self-given) *essence* of objects (and of *essential relationships*) also holds true a priori of the objects which have that essence.”¹⁹ Whether any such objects *exist*, however, and whether it is possible for us to have knowledge of their existence, is apparently not the concern of the phenomenologist qua phenomenologist. Scheler seems to acknowledge this when he writes, “If we examine them for their essential content, our inquiry is not concerned in any way with the question of which acts of a religious kind are ‘right or wrong’ and which objects of a religious kind are ‘real’ or ‘imaginary’ ” (EM 173).
36. Thus, for example, we can suppose that, if there is such a thing as the essence of a living organism, which can be brought to givenness through phenomenological analysis, then every proposition that is true of this essence will also be true of whatever living organisms may actually exist. Similarly, if there is an a priori value-idea of the divine, then whatever is true of it will also be true of each of the various ideas of divine beings discovered by the historian of religion. The source of ambiguity in Scheler’s philosophy arises from his use of terms like “objective,” “evidence,” and “fact,” where it is not always clear whether he is referring to real objects or objects of consciousness, factual evidence or phenomenological evidence, empirical facts or “pure” facts, respectively. (I will consider an example of this ambiguity momentarily.)
37. Scheler frequently expresses his disdain for the subjectivism of modern philosophy and its obsession with epistemology, accusing Kant and the Neo-Kantians of being preoccupied with the conditions of possible experience rather than looking first to see what is actually given in experience. In addition to the philosophical objections that he raises against Kant’s transcendental idealism, Scheler identifies the psychological *cause* of this epistemological obsession as a deep-seated “*hatred of the world*, a hostility toward the world and a distrust of it” (FE 67). Scheler finds this hostility expressed in the priority given to those forms of knowledge which make possible the technical mastery of nature, as well as in the need to

¹⁸Edmund Husserl, *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie*, 5th ed. (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1993), p. 13. The translation is mine. The first half of the citation is emphasized in the original.

¹⁹Max Scheler, “Phenomenology and the Theory of Cognition,” in *Selected Philosophical Essays*, tr. David Lachterman (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), p. 142.

“organize” and “control” nature according to laws of the understanding, and to “tame” the anti-social impulses of an egoistic, Hobbsian humanity. Provocative as Scheler’s criticisms may be, they are often stated dogmatically, and it is not clear how the recognition that he sometimes expresses of the epistemological limitations of phenomenological analysis is to be reconciled with the bold assertions that he makes about objective reality. For this reason, it will be prudent to consider the phenomenological and the epistemological aspects of his position separately.

38. As we have seen, Scheler makes a number of ambitious claims for the discipline called “essential phenomenology of religion.” Any full assessment of those claims would have to address such questions as whether it is possible to identify an “essence” of the divine that is logically prior to the individual places, people and events to which different people have attributed religious significance throughout the course of history. Can this “essence” be brought to phenomenological givenness in each case? Or mightn’t we be lead to conclude as a result of historical observation that “the divine,” and the experience of the divine, is always inscribed within a particular conceptual framework that is itself determined by concrete socio-linguistic conditions. No doubt, many contemporary historians of religion would want to make some such argument, and I suspect that they would be justified in doing so. Arguably, they must be prepared to respond to the challenge that Scheler would be likely to put to them. If there is no essence of the divine prior to all empirical observation, which allows certain kinds of beliefs and practices to be recognized as “religious” in the first place, then how is it that we are able to distinguish religious beliefs, attitudes and practices from other kinds of beliefs, attitudes and practices that are not religious?
39. Although, as the preceding remarks indicate, there are reasons to suspect that Scheler’s claims for the “essential phenomenology of religion” are exaggerated, his analyses of religious acts and their foundational order, even if they are not equally applicable to the entire region of empirical religious phenomena, are nevertheless frequently illuminating and point to a number of shortcomings of a rationalistic approach to the philosophy of religion that is exclusively concerned with the truth of religious propositions. After all, the same historian of religion who may be skeptical of Scheler’s claim that the empirical investigation of religious facts requires a priori knowledge of the essence of the divine is not thereby prevented from agreeing with Scheler that “religion is as fundamentally religious cognition and thought as it is also a special kind of feeling (of value), of (regulated) expression (in religious language, prayer and liturgy) and of volition and conduct (in the service of God and religious morality)” (EM 249). Even if the distinction between metaphysics and religion is not always as clear as Scheler makes it out to be, his observation that the religious believer is not primarily interested in metaphysical knowledge, and that there are important differences between the respective manners in which religious beliefs and other kinds of beliefs are held, deserve to be taken seriously. At the very least, these observations ought to cause the rationalist philosopher of religion to consider what he can expect to gain from his efforts. For if Scheler is correct, even a valid metaphysical proof of the existence of God would be incapable of yielding a *religious* conviction. Even if a belief in the existence of a supreme being who is the cause of everything that exists, or who is able to predict everything that will happen to me in the next twenty-four hours, were justified, it would remain to be shown that such a being is the appropriate object of prayer or worship. A belief in the existence of such a being would not be a religious belief unless or until that being were also recognized as the bearer of absolute value (i.e., holiness). And this recognition requires the execution (*Vollziehung*) of a religious act.

40. Leaving aside the more ambitious claims that Scheler makes for the essential phenomenology of religion, I shall focus on what I will call Scheler's minimal phenomenological claim. This is the claim that there are acts of consciousness available to the phenomenological analyst the intentional correlate of which is a religiously significant object of some kind. Such objects are recognized within the religious act as the bearer of religious value (i.e., holiness). Religious value, in other words, is not subsequently attributed to the object of a religious act, but is given phenomenally as a quality of the object intended by the religious act. The minimal phenomenological claim says nothing about whether any religious object exists independently of the consciousness in which it is intended. For the purposes of this paper, I will assume that Scheler's minimal phenomenological claim is correct in order to determine what epistemological consequences might follow from it. As I see it, the epistemological issue that remains to be considered is the following one. Even the religious believer whose primary interest is the salvific significance of certain events, apprehended through faith, seems necessarily to believe in the existence of a divine being who has performed these acts and is the guarantor of the assurance of salvation. What is there to prevent the evidentialist from asking whether the latter belief is justified? For surely the fact that people attribute religious value (i.e., holiness) to divine beings is no guarantee that such beings actually exist.
41. Our question, then, is whether or not the fact that genuinely religious acts of consciousness do, or have occurred (assuming that they have), is in any way relevant to the epistemological justification of religious belief. As I have already observed, on some occasions Scheler clearly states that knowledge of essences has no bearing on matters of fact. He is aware, for example that "we could never infer or prove the existence of a living being, even the simplest and most primitive, from knowledge of the dead [i.e., inorganic] world, however complete our understanding of that world" (259). In the very next sentence, however, Scheler goes on to say, "Only if we presuppose knowledge of the essence of living things . . . can we prove the existence of other living beings or phenomena of life from given examples" (EM 259). But this latter assertion appears to blur the distinction between eidetic knowledge and factual knowledge that was noted earlier.
42. The problem Scheler seems to overlook is that, even if we *do* presuppose knowledge of the essence of living things, this tells us only what such things must be like *if they do* exist, but nothing about whether such beings *do in fact* exist. Similarly, even if we accept Scheler's observation that no metaphysical proof could give us knowledge either of the nature or the existence of the divinity intended in the religious act, he still has not shown that knowledge of the essence of the divine is relevant to the question of whether any actual divine being exists. Nor do I see how Scheler's theory of religious acts in any way guarantees the truth of the proposition that the divinity whom the religious believer worships, to whom she prays, who is the object of her religious hopes and fears, whom she recognizes as the sole bearer of absolute value – that such a being exists. It is perfectly conceivable for one to accept Scheler's phenomenological observation that, in the foundational order of religious acts, the predication of value precedes the predication of being, without thereby having to conclude that the former establishes the validity of the latter. For if it is true that we cannot derive ought from is, it is no less true that we cannot derive is from ought. In other words, one can suppose that the divine is an object of worship, prayer, wonder, veneration, hope or dread before it becomes an object of thought, without thereby concluding that acts of worship, prayer, wonder, veneration, hope or dread are any proof of the existence of the being toward whom they are directed.
43. If it is true that the occurrence of religious acts in no way guarantee the existence of the objects

toward which they are directed, we must also bear in mind that a genuinely religious act is not capable of being reduced to or explained in terms of non-religious needs, wishes or desires. If Scheler's minimal claim is correct, then there *is* such a thing as genuinely *religious* desire, hope, reverence, and the fulfillment of such acts of feeling is not merely a compensation for frustrated non-religious (e.g., sexual or psychological) needs, even if religious beliefs sometimes do perform a compensatory function. In other words a *religious* need, wish or desire directed toward a divine being of some kind intends the essence of the divine, whether or not any divine being really exists. For the illusion of a divine being is precisely that, i.e. the illusion of a *divine being*, in exactly the same way that the illusory perception of a living organism is the illusion of a *living organism*, and not, for example, the illusion of an inorganic thing. Thus, if I am startled to see a bear in the woods, which, upon closer observation turns out to be the shadow of a tree branch moving in the wind, what I first saw was still the illusion of *a bear*, not some other kind of object.

44. We are now in a position to consider the epistemological conclusion that Scheler derives from his phenomenology of the religious act. Scheler argues as follows:

If the genesis and intentional aspect of religion can be explained in terms of extra- and pre-religious facts, if its object is to be regarded as a fiction or a synthesis derived from phantasmagorical distortions of mundane experience, then the truth of religion is a lost cause. If it is *not* susceptible of such explanations, then we are obliged to assume a domain of reality corresponding to religious acts with exactly the same right as that with which we posit the external and internal worlds, and the consciousness in fellowmen, as spheres of experience [EM 264].

Reading this passage in light of the exposition of Scheler's position developed in the first part of this paper, I think we can summarize his argument for the justification of religious belief as follows:

1. A religious act is an act of consciousness the intentional correlate of which is a phenomenologically irreducible religious value or a divine being who is the bearer of such a value.
2. Such acts occur.
3. Either the occurrence of religious acts can be explained in non-religious terms, or it cannot.
4. If the occurrence of religious acts can be explained in non-religious terms, then the evidence disclosed through such acts is illusory, and any beliefs founded upon this evidence are false. If the occurrence of religious acts cannot be explained in non-religious terms, then we must assume the real existence of a divine realm of being and value which is the cause of these acts.
5. Religious acts cannot be explained in non-religious terms because the religious values they intend are phenomenologically irreducible.
6. Therefore, a divine realm of being and value exists.

In order to be convinced by Scheler's argument, one must first accept his claim for the irreducibility of the religious value-modality. Because this value-modality constitutes a fundamental phenomenological datum, it cannot be deduced from or explained in terms of some other concept. "The indefinability of the X under investigation (*per genus et differential specifica*) is a sure sign that we have a genuine elementary essence which underlies ultimate concepts

but is itself 'inconceivable' " (EM 170). One can no more explain to someone what the holy or the divine "feels" like than one could explain what the color green looks like or what the taste of pineapple tastes like. This claim will not be taken up here. It is sufficient to note that one who is unable to recognize any distinctively religious value-modality will be prevented from accepting Scheler's conclusion.

45. Even if we do concede this point, however, it does not suffice to establish Scheler's conclusion. For the pivotal premise in Scheler's argument, which involves a decisive step beyond any phenomenological claim, is the fourth premise. The question is whether that premise involves a genuine disjunction. Suppose one is willing to acknowledge that religious experience cannot be explained in non-religious terms. Is one thereby obliged to conclude, as Scheler claims, that religious acts are caused by a divine being "who through them takes a natural way of making himself knowable to man?" (EM 264). In light of Scheler's insistence that the divine is apprehended immediately in the religious act, and never as the result of a causal inference, it is ironic that, in the end, the role that religious acts play in his argument for the justification of religious belief appears to depend upon just such an inference. Since religious acts involve the immediate apprehension of a religious content of some kind, and since such acts themselves "make no inferences" (as Berkeley once said of perceptions), there is no way to determine the cause of a religious act from the act itself. Nor is there any reason why a person with no vested interest at stake would feel compelled to draw such an inference. An epistemically cautious person would suspend judgment on the issue. But the religiously inclined person does have a vested interest at stake, since the decision she faces is likely to have significant implications for how she lives her life. It will affect, for example, whether or not she follows her religious inclinations or renounces them, and it is likely also to affect the kinds of activities she pursues, whether she regards prayer as a senseless or a meaningful activity, and, perhaps even the way she spends her time and money, etc. I am assuming that the would-be believer does have epistemological concerns, but that she has other kinds of concerns as well. Like Kant, she is interested in knowing not only what she can know, but also how she should act, and what hopes she may allow herself to entertain.
46. The problem confronting the religiously inclined person is to decide whether or not to regard her religious inclinations as evidence for the existence of the religious object toward which her religious feeling-acts are intentionally directed (even if that intention remains unfulfilled, say, in the form of a sense of longing for an absent God). Clearly, if such a decision can be epistemically justified, it will not be on the basis of an appeal to "sufficient evidence," since the issue is whether or not what is apprehended in the religious act should be allowed to *count* as evidence, and there is no further evidence that might settle the question. The would-be believer's only alternative is to insist that the principle of sufficient evidence is not the only standard for establishing whether or not a belief is justified. We have some grounds for assuming that the evidentialist ought to be willing to consider this possibility, since, after all, he is willing to regard at least one belief as justified which fails to satisfy the principle of sufficient evidence: namely the belief that it is wrong to believe anything on insufficient evidence. For it is difficult to see what kind of evidence might count in favor of this belief, so that if it is justified, it must be in some other way. It appears, then, that if the evidentialist's challenge is to be taken seriously, that challenge must be modified so as to specify which kinds of beliefs ought not to be accepted without sufficient evidence, and which beliefs may be justified on other grounds, including a belief in the principle of sufficient evidence.
47. What other grounds might the would-be believer appeal to in attempting to justify a decision

to regard the occurrence of religious acts as evidence for the existence of a religious reality? I propose that the epistemic predicament confronting the would-be believer is similar to one described by William James in his essay, "The Dilemma of Determinism." I think the would-be believer must relinquish the hope of proving that her religious desires are caused by a divine being who actually exists, just as in that essay James renounces the hope of proving that indeterminism is true. But it may be perfectly reasonable for such a person to assume as a "postulate of rationality" (James) that her religious desires are caused by such a being, and to act as if such a being exists, if this assumption can be shown to be more rational than the alternative. The would-be believer might reason as follows. If no religious reality or divine being exists, then the experience of genuine religious inclinations is senseless in the same way that the experience of regret is senseless in the event that free will is an illusion and determinism is true. In that case, the universe or fate has played a cruel trick on the religiously inclined person, just as it has on the person who experiences regret if free will turns out to be an illusion. She has been made to experience hopes and aspirations the realization of which is categorically impossible. She has been duped. She has been constituted so as to seek after something that cannot be found because it does not exist. To a person whose most profound aspirations are destined to remain unfulfilled, not merely due to bad luck or inauspicious circumstances, but by the very nature of things, the universe and life itself must be a source of inconsolable disappointment. Such a person may be tempted to conclude that she is a victim of false consciousness – that her *apparently* religious inclinations are in fact the expression of perfectly mundane hopes and fears that ought to be recognized for what they are and renounced.

48. And this is precisely the kind of disillusionment that we find the evidentialist exhorting the would-be believer she is solemnly obligated to endure. This exhortation is expressed in a curiously homiletic tone by Clifford in "The Ethics of Belief":

Belief, that sacred faculty which prompts the decisions of our will, and knits into harmonious working all the compacted energies of our being, is . . . desecrated when given to unproved and unquestioned statements, for the solace and private pleasure of the believer; to add a tinsel splendour to the plain straight road of our life and display a bright mirage beyond it; or even to drown the common sorrows of our kind by a self-deception which allows them not only to cast down, but also to degrade us.

Clearly, Clifford regards religious belief as a kind of illusory consolation for mundane fears, frustrations and disappointments. The person who chooses to indulge her religious impulses, on this view, willfully engages in an act of self-deception and self-degradation. And this, I think, is what really irks Clifford. He is, in effect, accusing the religious believer of acting (doxically) in bad faith. Because he does not recognize the possibility of a genuinely religious impulse or desire (i.e., because he rejects the minimal phenomenological claim), he is forced to conclude that the religious believer's doxic behavior is determined by ulterior, epistemically unwarranted motives.²⁰ The religious believer values self-gratification more highly than truth, and this is what Clifford finds morally reprehensible. And if Clifford's assessment of the situation is correct, we can certainly understand his indignation. But is his assessment correct?

²⁰Incidentally, since Clifford does appear to reject the minimal phenomenological claim, one wonders what meaning can possibly be attributed to his reference to belief as a "sacred faculty," since, if the minimal claim is false, then the adage is literally true that "nothing is sacred."

49. At this point, I want to suggest that the epistemological significance of Scheler's minimal phenomenological claim is *not* that the occurrence of religious acts in any way proves the existence of a divine being or beings. It is rather that, if we accept Scheler's minimal claim that religious acts constitute a phenomenologically distinct class of intentional acts of consciousness, then these acts cannot be reduced to, or explained in terms of, non-religious wishes, needs or desires. And if they cannot be explained reductively, then they must be explained in some other way, or not at all. Scheler would agree that, if Clifford is right, and religious impulses are illusory consolations, then the religiously inclined person ought to renounce them, no matter how deeply engrained they might be, and strive for more realistic forms of gratification. But if Scheler's minimal claim is correct, then there is no reason to suppose that the religiously inclined person's desires *can* be replaced by more mundane alternatives. For if Scheler is right, then the would-be believer finds herself in a situation similar to Peter's when the author of the Fourth Gospel has him ask, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life; and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God" (Jn. 6:68).
50. What Clifford requires of the would-be believer is that she deny her inclinations and disregard the evidence of her feeling-acts. What he requires, in short, is an ascetic renunciation of religious sentiment in the name of the principle of sufficient evidence. But has Clifford given us any reason to believe that, for example, when Augustine writes, "I tasted thee, and still I hunger and thirst for more. Thou didst but touch me, and I do even burn with a desire to enjoy thee," he is deceived about the nature of his desire?²¹ Clifford appears to suppose that Augustine *must* be deceived. But why? Presumably because there is no evidence to support the view that the divine object of Augustine's spiritual hunger and thirst exists. We must remember, however, that we do not have sufficient evidence to justify a belief that this object does *not* exist, either. And here I think Clifford has overstepped the bounds of his argument. For, what the ethics of belief demands, according to that argument, is the suspension of belief when the evidence is insufficient. But the assumption that there can be no such thing as a genuine religious inclination implies, not that judgment has been suspended, but that a negative judgment has been reached. And the terms of Clifford's own argument do not justify such a judgment. And so we are entitled to ask: Mightn't it be just as rational for the would-be believer to assume (albeit without knowing) that she has *not* been duped by the universe, and that the divine being who is the object of her religious hopes and fears, awe and reverence, prayer and worship does in fact exist. It is at least not immediately clear how this possibility is less rational than the alternative.
51. As I see it, the would-be believer is faced with a decision either to suspend judgment, or to believe that her religious inclinations are caused by a religious reality of some kind that actually exists. If the latter possibility is to be affirmed, it will require a decision on the part of the would-be believer to regard as evidential the religious value-correlates of feeling-acts directed toward a transcendent object. Now clearly, the epistemically cautious person will not be prepared to make this affirmation, since it involves more than is strictly warranted by the facts. If he accepts the minimal phenomenological claim, he will simply rest content with the recognition that, among the variety of human interests and inclinations are to be found certain religious interests and inclinations that do not seem to be able to be reduced to or explained in non-religious terms. And that's all. The person who experiences no religious inclinations of his own will have no motivation to draw an unnecessary inference. The would-be believer,

²¹ Augustine, *Confessions*, X xxvii, 38. Quoted here from *An Augustine Synthesis*, ed. Erich Przywara (New York: Harper, 1958), p. 75.

however, may have other motives for doing so. Are these motives necessarily epistemically irrelevant, so that they ought not under any circumstances to influence the decision of the would-be believer? If the would-be believer's only motive is her own "solace and private pleasure," as Clifford suggests, then I think we must agree that the motive is not epistemically relevant. But I don't think this is her only possible motive. The would-be believer's rationale might rather be that, having recognized in herself and others the occurrence of genuinely religious acts, and having been persuaded that such acts are not capable of being explained in terms of non-religious needs, wishes or desires, it is *more* rational to assume that a divine being exists who is the cause of these inclinations, than that it is possible for inclinations to exist the fulfillment of which is inconceivable. Louis Dupré admirably captures the line of thought underlying the would-be believer's decision to believe, I think, when he has that person say, " 'I am sure that there is a God, in the sense that I am quite sure that my love is not illusory.' " ²² The would-be believer's decision to affirm the existence of God is motivated by a postulate of reason which states the assumption that certain value-qualities are distinctly perceived, even though it is impossible for there to be an object which is the bearer of these value-qualities and the cause of their perception, is less rational than the assumption that such an object exists.

52. Of course, one cannot *decide* to know something, and the religiously inclined person would be mistaken if she were to think that her decision to regard her feeling-acts as a source of evidence were alone sufficient to justify a claim to know that her religious beliefs are true. By the same token, this possibility allows the recognition that religious faith does appeal to a *kind* of evidence, even if it is not the kind of evidence that the evidentialist requires for the justification of belief. This way of conceiving the relationship between faith and evidence lends philosophical merit to the definition of faith proposed by the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, according to whom "faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." Admittedly, the evidentialist is not likely to find any assurance here at all. For if the evidence that justifies religious belief only becomes available through the act of faith, then clearly no evidence can be forthcoming prior to the execution of that act, and this entails that, as long as the principle of sufficient evidence remains the sole criterion of epistemic justification, the act of faith itself must remain epistemically unjustified. The act of faith demands a leap beyond experience, which the evidentialist cannot condone.
53. On the other hand, it is not an entirely blind leap, since it does involve a certain kind of evidence, albeit one that only becomes available through a decision on the part of the would-be believer. But then, perhaps this is how it should be as long as a distinction is to be maintained between faith and knowledge. As Scheler observes, "Only the freedom of the act of faith, in contrast to the purely fact-bound (*sachgebunden*) act of the understanding, makes possible the evidence of faith and its 'rock-solid' certitude" (EM 151/147). The question I have attempted to address is whether that decision, which is not based on evidence, can be shown to be epistemically justified in some other way. By submitting Scheler's theory of the religious act to a Jamesian interpretation, I hope to have shown that the religiously inclined person may legitimately lay claim to "the freedom of the act of faith" on practical grounds. The decision to accept on faith the evidence disclosed in the religious act is rationally justified insofar as no better explanation of the occurrence of such acts is available, and the decision required of the would-be believer

²²Louis Dupré, *Religious Mystery and Rational Reflection* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), pp. 137-38. The quote appears in the context of a discussion of the simultaneous sense of the presence and absence of the divine, and continues, " 'I am quite sure that there is not a God, in the sense that I am quite sure nothing real can be anything like what I am able to conceive when I pronounce this word.' "

is bound to have significant practical implications. "If, then," as Augustine once wrote, "it is reasonable that faith precede reason to attain to certain great truths which cannot yet be understood, it is without doubt true that it is reason, in however small degree, that persuades us to it, so that reason itself precedes faith."²³

Notes

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²³Augustine, *Epistolae* CXX, I, 3, 4. Quoted here from *An Augustine Synthesis*, p. 62.