

The Primacy of the Giving of Facts Around the Problem of Apriorism in Max Scheler

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Abstract: The discussion revolves around the thesis that “in no case does apriorism lead to idealism”, taken as a fulcrum around which two movements are made. Firstly, this thesis is explained and then, in the second movement, reasons are given for thinking about the meaning of apriorism from the immanence of phenomenological experience, by grounding the problem in the essential and immediate intuition of knowledge-data. Consequently, the primary meaning of a priori is determined from the eidetic correlation between what is given in an absolute and evident way, in the sphere of facts, and the intuitive vision. This clarifies the meaning of the material character of the self-giving of facts, without naively identifying materiality with the mere sensible content of empirical observations. In the last movement, starting with the indication of the meaning and essence of knowing as (lovingly) partaking in the object of knowledge, the meaning of apriority in the sciences is discussed, tracing the emergence of formalism back to a certain type of reduction that artificially constructs the object. In this procedure, the prejudice against the sensible operates by relegating it to data deprived of original forms, justifying the need to mold them into forms exclusive to the understanding. Scheler's intention to remove the problem of apriorism from the hermeneutic horizon of modernity is thus evident, because its tendency, rooted in “hatred of the world” and hostility to the “chaos” of the sensible, consists of functionalizing the spirit's forms of thought and intuition by admitting them as a formative activity and synthetic force typical of reason.

Keywords: Apriorism; Essential Intuition; Phenomenological Experience; Material A Priori

*The philosophy which has phenomenology
as its foundation (...) is based on facts, and
facts alone, not on constructions of an
arbitrary “understanding” [Verstandes].*

Max Scheler, in *Der Formalismus in der Ethik und die
materiale Wertethik*

1. Introduction

To discuss in a philosophical way is to go round and round with a question. It's walking in circles. For philosophizing is not always about going forward, step by step, from argument

to argument, under the foundation of the certainty of prior knowledge, until you reach the final goal. Oriented towards an anticipated goal, calculated but yet to be achieved, it always looks outwards. Philosophizing, on the other hand, prefers to stay within what is known or supposedly already known, to look inwards and towards the heart of the matter, moving in circular movements, always sticking to the same thing. For philosophizing, the goal is not beyond, but below. Precisely, it is at the center and in the background of what is put into question in order to know it originally. Thought is directed towards the goal, therefore, when it doesn't move away from the place where it is. It remains there, launching itself into what has not yet been obtained, what has not yet been radically thought. In order to make this move, however, it stays with what it has, letting it appear more and more clearly and, in this way, more and more problematic or worthy of being questioned. In this way, the person who surrounds the question can discover themselves sustained in not knowing, realizing that what they possess through knowledge is, in fact, precisely what escapes their possession, the absolutely unknown. In fact, this is what happens when the person who surrounds and philosophically discusses their "object" is willing to look into the pit, into the abyss of truth gathered in non-knowledge, which opens up in the center (which is the question itself). And, in this disposition, it remains within the circle that circling establishes.

Circling something that makes you think, in this way, does not indicate a preference for the peripheral, nor the dizziness of a aimless wandering akin to a blind human being, a movement that only borders the periphery of the things in question; circling the question does not necessarily make you dizzy on the margins or on the surface of what is to be thought. Of course, there is a circling that only returns to the starting point "empty-handed". This is only the one that goes round and round, but without picking up what is unusual in the midst of the disarray of the initial position with its respective initial field of vision. So, it's that circling that doesn't project itself into the heart of the event of destabilizing rigid pre-understandings, from which one always departs on the path to reflection and knowledge. Such disordering experiences of what is known are inevitable for those who are willing, instead of wandering around themes and questions and being content with overflying thought, to thoughtfully circle what they want to know.

There is no denying, however, that circling the issue is vertiginous. However, it is precisely when one protects oneself from this vertigo that one succumbs, that one returns to the starting point without the evidence gained through experiential insight and without the knowledge that results from it; an experience that takes place only in the circling around the

“always the same question”. The lack of such experiential engagement translates into a lack of perception that when you return, after one or more laps, to the starting point, that is, to the same place where you positioned yourself and opened up your horizon of vision, your relationship with the questioned has been profoundly transformed. They have been thrown into the deep end. At the same time, what is being questioned is being taken in another way, by another vision or intellection. Both the targeting and the target in the question are transformed. It is therefore necessary to accept the dizziness of always having to go round in circles in philosophizing and thus take the risk of falling over. For, as Heidegger (1995: 180) warns us, “yet anyone who has never been seized by dizziness in the presence of a philosophical question has never asked the question in a philosophical way, that is, has never entered the circle in the first place”.

In this way, it's not appropriate to expect the following lines to be discussed in a linear and progressive movement. Right from the title, “The primacy of the giving of facts”, a circular dynamic is immediately evident; a primacy is claimed not in order to discuss it in terms of itself, but in order to touch on the center of another theme that is called into question throughout this discussion. Therefore, the expression “around” in the subtitle is not ancillary. Thus, the title only expresses the attempt to revolve around an issue that is usually considered a problem in the theory of knowledge, especially since Kant: the problem of apriorism. We begin our circling discussion around the problem with a first and preliminary explanation of what is at stake in Scheler's confrontation with the formalist understanding of apriorism.

2. “In no case does apriorism lead to idealism”. Apriorism and the giving of facts

From Kant's perspective, knowledge of material data, apprehended through sensible experience, has the condition of possibility of being (re)presented in the forms that precede them, through which these data are ordered. In this projection of *a priori* forms onto the data of sensibility, the cognizing subject compares them, connects and separates them (Kant, 1974a), in short, thinks them. To know is to connect, and in order to do so, it is necessary to recognize its origin in thinking, with its categories of connection and synthesis, which precede all experience. This, then, is the role of apriorism in human knowing. Throughout modernity, the problem has been taken up again by phenomenological thinking in contemporary times. In various interpretations of the problem, phenomenology recognizes the centrality of apriorism as a necessary imposition for knowing to be configured as the apprehension of the thing itself

and, as such, the experience of apprehending it as it is. By describing, on the one hand, how the thing itself is shown and, on the other, how this experience takes place, phenomenology is committed to the attitude of knowledge that prevents it from subjugating both the thing thought and the meaning of the act or faculty of its apprehension to the imposition of any external, formalist understanding or determination. Thus, it preserves the idea of an experience prior to the division between subject and object (psychologically and/or objectively conceived) and refuses an a posteriori link between these poles in the act of knowing; by proceeding in this aprioristic way, it aims to be more radical and original than the modern theory of knowledge.

This essential link between phenomenology and the thing itself is made explicit when both the subject and its object, as well as the relationship between the two, are brought back to the transcendental field as the realm of experience of *a priori* constitutions and interrelationships. Within it, phenomenological analysis considers the problem in question under radically different principles and directions from Kantism, in particular by overcoming the modern dichotomy between phenomenon and noumena. The purpose of these lines is to outline some considerations on how this character of pure knowledge directed towards the things themselves is assumed within Scheler's phenomenology. Circularly, it will try to explain the reasons why Scheler takes the position in favor of the idea of phenomenology as radical and original knowledge, because it is fundamentally a singular experience of what is given in facts, with what is par excellence material, even though experience remains *a priori*. And he does so, it is worth noting, in constant confrontation with the formalism of Kantian doctrine.

In view of this confrontation, from which Scheler's interpretation of the meaning of a priori knowledge should not be exempted or displaced, it is necessary to better clarify the point around which, centrifugally, we intend to turn towards a phenomenological understanding of the issue. In a late writing, *Idealismus – Realismus*, Scheler (2008d: 204, translated by me) states in no uncertain terms: "In no case does apriorism lead to idealism". The same statement appears, in his great treatise on ethics, rephrased in the following terms: "This wholly unfounded restriction and limitation of the 'a priori' also has its roots in his identification of the 'a priori' with the *formal*" (Scheler, 2000: 83; 1973: 64). This thesis of the impossibility of equating apriorism with pure forms in thought and sensibility will lead to the development of the question in the lines below. It should be noted that, in the quotation taken from the treatise *Der Formalismus in der Ethik und die materiale Wertethik*, it is made clear that this stranglehold of the understanding of the *a priori* on formality is just one of the reasons why it is misunderstood in Kantian doctrine. Along with this inadequate identification of apriorism with

formalism, one should also hear the refutation of subjectivist, transcendentalist, spontaneist interpretations of the *a priori*, which are interpenetrated in Kant's formalist interpretation. Scheler's position is extended even further if we consider what precedes the last quote:

Logic and a *pure doctrine of values* [*reine Wertlehre*] stand *side by side*. Though Kant wavers on these questions, he becomes all the more firm in his position that all feelings, even love and hate, basically belong to the “sensible” sphere; he excludes them from ethics because he cannot assign them to “reason.” (Scheler, 2000: 83; 1973: 64)

Scheler's position is clear in the following respect: not only the theory of knowledge is affected by errors in the formalist interpretation of the *a priori*, but also the other great areas of intentional experience of apprehending and conceiving things from the giving of their qualities and essence, such as ethics and aesthetics. Regarding ethics, the formalist interpretation prevents us from reaching a proper knowledge of the ethical field (the material knowledge of values) through acts, named by Scheler with the broad term feeling (*Fühlen*); among them, he highlights love and hate. These acts are characterized, among other things, by the fact that they are essentially directed towards the donation of the qualities of values, as well as the hierarchy pre-established by the essence of values, within a “sensitive” experience with the goods that bear them, giving rise to an emotional knowledge of what surrounds us, which precedes the knowledge of quiddities. Acts, therefore, essentially of an *a priori* nature. In other words, formalism blocks the way to the construction of phenomenological ethics and authentic moral discernment, both of which are based on intuitive knowledge in the sense of a phenomenological “view of the essence” (the essential intuiting, *Wesensschau*) of the materiality specific to values. In this way, a kind of aprioristic knowledge concerns both the character of the act and the object, even though the latter is material and “sensible”. Now, the singular good that love loves and wishes to see magnified or that hate repels and diminishes is not a formal concept, empty of materiality. On the contrary, the good is loved and hated according to what makes it *concretely* worthy or unworthy; it is loved or hated for what it is “really” worth, although love, in its clairvoyance, sees in this material reality of value still a certain virtuality, that is, the potentiality of being able to show itself to be of even greater value, to be able to be fully in its axiological dignity. Hate, on the other hand, blinds itself to this potentiality, as it prefers to diminish or even annihilate it. However, why does formalism lead us towards this denial and depreciation of materiality, which doesn't only happen in the sphere

of ethical knowledge and discernment? Certainly because of a determining tendency or historical attitude, stemming from a way of being and thinking, widespread in modernity, which leads us to conceive of the human and its essential relationships with things in a certain direction, which has yet to be described. For now, we can only say that this denial is the consequence of the exclusion, in the sensible sphere, of the possibility of an *a priori* knowledge of ideal forms, of thinking about the meaning of the thing itself.

In order to make this last observation, which is only provisional or indicative, clearer, it is also necessary to look at the reverse side of all the interpretations of the *a priori* linked to Kant's formalist position. The abovementioned words are almost like a corollary to Scheler's warning (2000: 73-74) about an error of Kant's that lies at the base of the formalist conception of the *a priori*, operated after the latter's restriction to the "thought": the identification of sensible content with material content¹, whether in ethics or in the theory of knowledge. In both practical and theoretical interests, reason belittles the material, conceives of it as a chaos deprived of essential forms or holds it responsible for actions whose motive would be the emotional states of pleasure and displeasure. But all this is just the consequence of sticking to matter, in ethics, as empirical determinants of the will (Kant, 1974b) or, in the theory of knowledge, as the corresponding effect of the affection of the object on the receptive capacity of sensibility (Kant, 1974a), instead of retaining them as data of essential intuiting. Scheler accuses the state of interpretation of the question in which both the *a priori* is constrained to the formal and the material datum is strangled within the limits of sensuality, of the sensualist understanding of perception. Formalism and sensualism, in relation to the problem analyzed, would be like the sides of the same coin. In the confines of a formalistic interpretation, then, it remains to be admitted that apriorism is the characteristic restricted to acts that superimposes

¹ The reader is warned to be attentive to the meaning of the terms matter and material, distinguishing the phenomenological meaning from the usual and/or consecrated meaning in the modern theory of knowledge. In line with the phenomenological sense, the terms allude, as will be explained, to the data of essential intuiting. In the opposite direction, if taken from the perspective of the (Kantian) theory of knowledge, they refer to the properties of empirical data. According to this latter meaning, sensible data in its effectiveness is placed as an object of delight or, on the contrary, that does not please the human faculty of desire. As such, they can be accepted as material principles of agency and action, but empirically based. Furthermore, because of this empirical materiality, human agency and action would fall into the situation of being selfishly realized, since they are determined according to sensible enjoyment, driven by expected pleasure or the avoidance of displeasure. Then, guided by a self-love which would make man, from an ethical point of view, lose himself as a subject of reason, to decide only through a heteronomous will, by letting himself be led by his "worst part" (sensation), by lower desires, thus leading himself by the subjective-particular content of the sensible representations of material data. In the footnote on p. 45 of the current article, see some considerations against this sensualist interpretation of materiality, on account of which men would be incapable of great and noble love, or of sublime works.

or imposes a form on the material, reducing it to the content of a certain sensible state - hence the reason for refuting, together with this imposing determination of the *a priori*, the interpretation based on the spontaneity of human understanding in the face of the data of sensibility.

To escape the limits of this reductionist interpretation, then, it is necessary to read between the lines of the thesis “In no case does apriorism lead to idealism” that the (material) data, since they are inalienably present within the eidetic correlations of the different modalities of knowledge, do not refer to sensible contents. Rather, they concern the way in which a certain content presents itself within the experience of grasping the meaning of the giving of the facts of knowledge and, throughout the course of this experience, their completion until they reach absolute evidence. The data also have their anteriority, as well as an anterior and privileged position in cognitive relations, provided that knowing is, in its maximum dignity, the capture of the being of objects, that is, understood as the experience that allows the latter to be patented in their essence. From this perspective, data is the very materiality of knowledge which, when realized through phenomenological experience, is consummated towards full evidence. It is therefore necessary to hear between the lines of the thesis around which we revolve not only the rejection of the formalist interpretation, but the positive admission from which the attempt to dismantle it stems: *a priori* concerns, before any other conception, the content of the immediate intuition of the thing itself. Having said that, it is necessary to listen to the whole context in which the thesis that is at the heart of this discussion is based. It can be found in a single paragraph of *Idealismus - Realismus*, in which Scheler summarizes his position on the problem of apriorism:

Finally, the problem of reality must be sharply separated from the problem of *apriorism*. It reappears in the intuitional and rational cognition, just as it plays its own role in the value doctrines (axiology, ethics, aesthetics). (...) In no case does apriorism lead to idealism; only in Kant are the two doctrines linked together - a consequence of the principle that aprioristic elements can be reduced to forms of thought and intuition, to “functional laws” of the human spirit, which only in the process of experience are also form laws of the being of the objects of experience. Kant's false doctrine of givenness (*Gegebenheitslehre*), that only sensations are given, is thereby presupposed. But if, as we do, we admit the forms of thought and intuition of the human spirit to arise only through the functionalization of insights of essence (*Wesenseinsichten*) on entity itself originally gained from *an* exemplar, then such a connection ceases to exist. The hypothesis of a “constancy” of the human organization of reason within the history of reason then

also becomes superfluous. New insights of essence gained from being itself can always be functionalized. (Scheler, 2008d: 204, translated by me)

It follows that *a priori*, generically, are intellections of essence “originally gained from *an* exemplar”, as well as the forms that arise from it. In this expression, emphasis is placed on the article “an”, which in this context is not the indefinite article, but a word that functions as an indication for the entity in concrete, “objectively” already given through a single exemplar. Following this position, clarifying the problem requires showing how and to what extent aprioristic knowledge, based on this insight into the being of the entity in concrete, must arise from the attitude of remaining close to the entity, welcoming the manifestation of its essence. The essence of knowledge must point to the participation in this event of the givenness of the being, making the constitution of the object possible; reinforcing that, by virtue of this donation of its quidative content, the being makes of itself the specific fact of a given knowledge and/or type of intuition. But the demonstration of the essence of knowing in these terms does not require the knowing subject to be a faithful empirical observer of facts, from which it would arrive, after observations of various examples of entities of the same essence, from a certain quantum of experience, at a universal conclusion by means of induction. Rather, it only requires that knowledge be, in its essence, apprehension committed to the being which, in its concreteness of its suchness (*Sosein*) what it is, presents itself in this way and absolutely not in another, which means in no way that its concreteness is its empirical reality, and even less so as given to sensibility. Furthermore, it is possible for the entity to be of only one number in its concreteness of existence. In fact, knowledge of essence “can each be carried out on a single exemplifying case” (Scheler, 2008c: 79, translated by me). Now, formal definitions about a certain ontic region, which can be arrived at by generalizing data from a series of observations, already presuppose that what is observed is already targeted in its essence (Scheler, 2008e: 395-396), even if only from a single example. Strictly speaking, because it is not a matter of induction but of intuition and evident seeing, essentiality as such is neither a generic nor an individual fact. Therefore, committed to the being in its concreteness or to what defines it as such is, rather, knowledge implicated in the revelation of its eidetic concreteness in some of its exemplars or in a single exemplar. This implication is possible from the finesse and shrewdness of discernment of a seeing capable of a clear understanding, directed towards the one and the essential qualities of the exemplar(s) that appear(s) in its field of vision.

In conditions of excellence, this vision is proper to the human spirit, not an exclusive property of the transcendental ego. This is because it is based on an act that Scheler (2008b: 40) defines as the uniqueness of the human spirit: the act of ideation. And this is how he defines it: “to ideate means to co-grasp the *essential* qualities and the structural forms of the world by *an* example of the respective region of being” (Scheler, 2008b: 41, translated by me). And he adds that the knowledge originating from this act is valid for an infinite number of things of the same essence, as well as for all human “subjects”, considered independently of their sensibility and its connection to chance, and therefore for every spiritual subject (the person as the center of spiritual acts) who thinks and intuites the same material. Therefore, they are knowledge worthy of the value of anteriority, also in relation to us, as empirical subjects, not only to things in their factual existence. He concludes: “Insights that we gain in this way are therefore valid *beyond* the limits of our sensory experience (...). We call them ‘*a priori*’ in school language” (Scheler, 2008b: 41, translated by me).

In this way, the knowledge and the knowing that can rightly be sealed with the term *a priori* arises from being close to the being from and throughout the intellection of its essence, which is renewed in ever new forms, depending on the acuity of this vision. In this, it can be seen that the forms belong, *a priori*, to the beings themselves; therefore, the understanding, strictly speaking, does not need to imprint them on them. These forms are already given, beforehand, as the matter of any way of knowing. Of course, this is the point of remaining close to the facts, namely to keep the spirit's vision firmly linked to the giving of the facts, so that it can rise, united with the latter, in ever purer and more absolute intellections. This is what we want to explore in our first turn around the thesis presented, seeking to clarify the impossibility of identifying apriorism with formalism, but by highlighting the experience of this vision. We won't lose the focus of the discussion by directing it towards the “no” of this impossibility. Rather, we will focus on the “positivity” that excludes such an identification. The reason for this focus on the essential and positive is as follows: the origin of *a priori* knowledge, such as that of essences, is not exempt from inherence in every form of experience (Scheler, 2008c: 79). Evoking its fundamental meaning, let's call it phenomenological experience, for reasons to be explained.

3. Apriorism and the phenomenological experience

It has been said that phenomenology recognizes the centrality of the problem in apriorism. This recognition appears, for example, in the fact that the idea of a transcendental horizon has been preserved, since transcendental refers, above all, to valid knowledge, beyond or above the realm of sensible experience (restricted to the set of causalities and effective existences of things), as well as to knowledge about the being, more rigorously, about “as it is *in itself* (*an sich selbst*) and *within itself* (*in sich selbst*)” (Scheler, 2008c: 80). Thus, with its vocation for the experience of apprehending this “suchness”, that is, the thing itself or, to put it another way, the being as it shows itself for itself and in itself, phenomenological thought strengthened the need for transcendental and intentional regard. It stresses the importance of gaining a transcendental horizon, precisely in order to keep alive and vigorous the attitude that characterizes it, that of placing itself receptively before the gift of the phenomenon. And this, in its beginnings, with the aim of being able to elaborate a rigorous science (philosophy, although repositioned in its very possibility, in the phenomenological method, and erected from an original attitude towards being), founding knowledge on apodictic bases. As Husserl teaches us, the pure transcendental ego is no longer a natural man who is grasped by means of an internal and psychological perceiving and, through this, reaches his psychic life which, moreover, would also be under the domination of an understanding of the natural attitude. Against this, it is worth remembering that this *ego* is admitted not as a capsule, but as a stream of *cogitationes* essentially directed towards the “world”, more precisely towards the giving of the object that is each time specific to one of its various *cogitationes*. For the problem in question, it's important to emphasize that this is about the ego, whose being is “prior in the order of knowledge to all Objective being: In a certain sense he is the underlying basis on which all Objective cognition takes place” (Husserl, 1995: 28; 1982: 27). In a field dominated by notions, evidence and, one could say, pure existences, called transcendental consciousness, phenomenology therefore lays its foundations and, in this, makes the problem of the *a priori* its “subject”, the mode of being of the “inter-est” of philosophy as a rigorous science for all that there is. Phenomenology, as knowledge of essences, can only exist with itself in the realm of anteriority. Another question, although essentially related, is whether phenomenology, since its beginnings, has achieved a fundamental understanding of the *a priori*, to the point of concretely capturing with it the being of this *ego*, the factual-existential experiences of the “I am” that precede the existence of the transcendental cogito, even when it has been stripped of empirical-natural determinations and

led into a phenomenal realm that has made its identification with intentional consciousness possible. Ontological-hermeneutic perspectives of phenomenological thought would say no.

Of course, phenomenology is deeply indebted to the aprioristic position, which was imposed in the history of thinking with Kantian formalism. However, it assumes it as the sphere into which philosophical thought is led by means of a rigorous attitude towards the world and consciousness, as opposed to the natural attitude of everyday thought and the positive sciences, which is unconcerned with the possibility of knowing and indifferent to the presence of things in themselves. He then takes the same position by radically suspending the affirmations of this natural attitude. It does so in order to re-enter the realm of *a priori* validity, constitution and relations, that is, in order to grasp the world, the subject, consciousness with its acts, the correlates of these acts and everything else that exists as what is always “over there”, “here” or “there”, before any reflection, but in force, constituted, self-presenting, showing itself in and from its quidative content. In short, to apprehend everything that is from the givenness of the phenomenon as a prior and original instance, as the foundation of any rigorous knowledge. In this way, phenomenology continues the aprioristic positioning before things, which can only be reached in the transcendental horizon, so as to be able to apprehend a pure given, that is, purified of any empirical-natural determinations. In fact, these are the object of naive considerations about the existence of things, of facts. Whether scientific or everyday, they agree that the facts and the matter of knowledge would be anything that is simply there and at the disposal of the knowing subject (Husserl, 2009: 56-57). While pure, in another perspective, that datum is also absolute, because it is a “reality” that is determined in and of itself and is intuited by thought precisely when it is purified, in a regard of the essential, from its relations with other factual determinations. Absolute, in this case, is the givenness of the thing itself, but as split off and free from any other ontologically contingent determination.

Having said that, what does it mean for phenomenology to return to something fundamental and prior, installing itself in an *a priori* realm of essences and eidetic relations, a pre-thematic domain by nature, conceiving things in a transcendental horizon and under the sign of anteriority? Well, the absolute giving of something pure is what guarantees that a certain fact proper to knowledge is constituted as such, so that the true phenomenon of knowledge is precisely this giving. Correlatively, seeing and understanding the giving of these facts without mediation, in purity and absoluteness or in the splitting of all relativity of their data, is the knot of knowledge. In Husserl's words (Husserl, 1986: 74; s.d.: 55), “this *evident act of seeing* (*evidentes Schauen*) is itself *knowing in the most precise sense*”. Consequently,

phenomenology, by placing philosophy in “a wholly new dimension” and constructing it from a method that has “a wholly new point of departure” (Husserl, 1986: 24; s.d.: 20), in a clear break with Kantian principles, reworked transcendence in another direction as the place of constitution and aprioristic relations between knowing and the known and, in this way, as being no less the locus in which the very possibility of knowing is established. Phenomenology resolves it within intentional immanence, since the data itself (as a really (*reell*) constituent of lived experience) and the fact of knowledge are not outside the sphere of cogitationes. The data is already inside the *cogitatio*, understood as a significant experience. In this sense, immanence is therefore synonymous with the “absolute and clear givenness, self-givenness (*Selbstgegebenheit*) in the absolute sense” (Husserl, 1986: 35; s.d.: 27). According to this interpretation, the transcendental refers to a sphere of absolute data, an *a priori* realm of evidence in which knowledge needs to be based in order to dispel all enigmas about its essence. It itself is the sphere in which the objects and acts of knowing are “facts” in the essential sense, as long as they are considered from the grace of their clear and full self-givenness. And not only the objects, but also the acts, as will be seen. In any case, addressing the object or thing sought by knowledge is then only possible in an immanent way, that is, by conceiving it as a fact that donates its essentiality as a correlate necessarily belonging to the act of knowing and, furthermore, by giving itself to it in the way of absolute evidence, without having to look for it outside. So, without wanting to learn it from an external point of view, as in the natural attitude, through the sensitive organs, as a given that is actually there (empirically) and, moreover, extrinsic to knowing. Therefore, without wanting to identify, in a blind posture, the facts of knowledge in sensible data, in order to then illuminate it with the laws of reason, that is, without seeing them beforehand in an evident seeing or, rather, without realizing that sensible experience is already guided by such *a priori* vision (for example, in order to affirm with complete certainty that I only sensibly see the face of a cube, it is necessary that I have first and fully seen it from its idea, that is, it has become an evident fact¹).

Using another understanding, coming from Scheler's phenomenology, which is said not to fully agree with the details of the Husserlian position of having to reduce the phenomenon to a transcendental field, but which does not deny the reduction and retains the need to have to

¹ A series of secondary acts is necessary for only one face of the cube to be considered as the first and only thing visible beforehand, that is, as the sensible datum of the experience. Since it is impossible to describe this experience with its successive modifications of acts here, the reader is referred to the phenomenological analysis of the example carried out by Scheler (2000: 75-77).

“cancel” and “bracket” the casual coefficients of the existence of things in the world in order to reach the data of absolute evidence (Scheler, 2008b: 42), then it is possible to say the same from another perspective: it is directed towards its own fact, if knowing does not go beyond the limits of the phenomenological experience of intellection of the data as an intuitive content or a fact of intuition, but persists within it. In short, “phenomenological experience is at the same time ‘immanent’ experience” (Scheler, 2000: 70; 1973: 51). For only in it and throughout it can what can be known be, each time, what it is, or, to put it perhaps more rigorously, only in it does the specific object of a certain intuition and immediate seeing actually show itself to be the intuible (Scheler, 2008f). This, then, is the eminently positive meaning of phenomenology's return to the *a priori* realm of pure and absolute data: to safeguard its fundamental attitude that characterizes it as a possibility of rigorous and essential thinking, that attitude, then, which can be translated into maintaining and persisting in the immanence of the experience of pure, absolute facts as what allows knowing or knowledge to show itself in its most pregnant sense. What this sense of knowing in general is, according to Scheler, is something that still needs to be clarified, precisely in order to make evident the reasons for his assumption of the aprioristic position in his phenomenology and the principles of interpreting the problem.

In any case, it should be noted that there is also a negative meaning, or rather a preventive or, if preferred, admonitory one. Scheler (2000: 71) puts it this way: all errors begin when the problem of the *a priori* and any position on it, respectively, is placed outside the immanent and intentional plane of phenomenological experience – which for the thinker has the same meaning as essential intuiting (*Wesensschau*) or phenomenological intuition (*phänomenologische Anschauung*) (Scheler, 2000: 68). The errors begin when the positions on the problem extend to extra-intentional horizons, which hinders or even refutes the possibility of the evident and immediate seeing of essences, as is the case with all theories that objectify things and the experiences of knowing them. In fact, the loss of this transcending (in the sense of intentional and intuitive directing) in immanence, a constituent element of experience that allows the fact that knowledge appears from its giving to be present, otherwise, knowing is situated outside the essential connection between the constitution of the cognitive act and that of the object, whereby intuition takes part in the giving of the intuited fact through its self-presentation, the given becomes the merely transcendent. The given becomes that which cannot be intuited as being itself, giving itself an immediate self-evidencing, making it susceptible to causal explanations or defined in reference to a psychological genesis. Extracted from phenomenological experience, it is therefore only what is merely ascertainable as what is simply

there, an effectivity that is ready for a further natural and naive consideration of knowing, something that is available beforehand to the different modes of access, especially sensitive perception. This promotes the naive equivalence between the data of experience and the data of sensation, obtained through observation and induction. However, the former can only be reached immediately through essential intuition. As a result, the sensible content of the data is confused with what, par excellence, defines the content of being-given: the way in which the given presents itself (Scheler, 2000). Hence, of course, the need to establish causal relationships and, in short, to recognize *a priori* forms of connection and synthesis of the data of experience that establish reason as the source of rules and principles of possible experience, giving it an objective reality.

For Scheler and against this position, it is necessary to defend the “empirical” character of phenomenology, of having to go to the facts and only to the facts of knowledge. However, these are not defined in principle through the application of categories, through judgments that precede them. On the contrary, they are the pure, absolute facts of phenomenological seeing and intuition, whose data are the *a priori* content of intuition and thus the “matter” of knowledge in the sense of “cause”, “motive”, and “object”. The only possible originary experience, then, is the phenomenological one, which is not a pure act of thought (in the sense of formalism), but dependent on the material data of the intuition of essences as *a priori* facts of both theoretical and practical knowledge. In this sense, the refutation of the errors of objectifying theories of data, whether sensualist or formalist, under the tone of equating phenomenology with a very particular “empiricism” (based not on observation and induction of facts, but on phenomenological intuition), returns to the warning not to transcend the limits of phenomenological experience. In this way, the negative and admonitory meaning of the assumption of the problem of the *a priori* within phenomenological thought converges with its first positive meaning.

Having highlighted this inalienable empirical dimension of phenomenology and defined its limits and meaning from the immanence or interiority of phenomenological experience, it is already possible to foresee: facts are, in their eminent sense of “thing itself” or “fundamental cause”, the knowing subject. For Scheler (2000: 90), the description and analysis of this transcendence in immanence, carried out within phenomenological experience, does not belong exclusively to the establishment of eidetic correlations between act and thing, noesis and noema, that is, that correlation in which the essence of a given act corresponds to the essence of a certain defined thing (colors are to seeing, just as sound is to hearing). As essential as this,

two other types of eidetic correlation constitute authentic fields of phenomenology. The field of analysis also includes correlations with the essence of the qualities and thing-contents (*Sachgehalt*) as given in acts (thing-phenomenology [*Sachphänomenologie*] with its eidetic materiality, for example, values) as well as the *a priori* connections that are established between such qualities (for example, the hierarchy of values pre-established based on their essence). Likewise, the relations with the essence of acts and between them belong to the broad field of phenomenological analysis, which, being a pure act, actualization, cannot be indicated in any way in terms of objectivity, but rather in terms of consummation (*Aktvollzug*, execution of acts) (genetic phenomenology or the genesis of acts, for example, love and hate). However, as the purpose of an intentional aim, or under the sights of reflection, their essence gives itself away to immediate intuition, and, in a way, acts possess a certain “materiality” that is not a substantial form at all, but pure genesis according to their particular *a priori* laws, which, however, can only be grasped through correlation by another spiritual subject, by taking part in the spiritual life of another person, performing their acts together with them in a simultaneous, preceding or prior way (Scheler, 2000) – which doesn't mean transforming the person with their acts, by means of internal perception, into a psychological fact, a datum of the interiority of a certain self set against the external world. Privileging only one of these fields, especially that of the correlations between the essence of the act and the essence of the thing, is to restrict the essential aspects of phenomenological experience to a one-sided analysis and view of the possible connections between intuition and essence, leaving gaps that would allow the erroneous determination of the *a priori* based on the idea of the conformation of objects to the laws of acts, as Kant did. In the final analysis, this means attributing apriorism to the power of the transcendental subject to recognize in itself the necessity and objectivity of facts and, consequently, to shape or form the data of sensible intuition (subjectivist interpretation). Against this transcendental subjectivism, considering the eidetic correlation with the data of the thing that presents itself to intuition, every phenomenological experience is essentially always referred to the facts and has a specific materiality.

But what does this emphasis on materiality mean? It reinforces that phenomenology, being a science of essences, is always about the concrete; and, considering that the concrete gives itself in the fulfillment of the meaning of its singular essence, phenomenology is knowledge that demonstrates and describes the concretization of the concrete. It also means that phenomenological experience is per se the “place” of concrete apprehension and evidence of this concretization. As Scheler (2000) points out, it is the only type of experience through

which all the concepts, definitions and judgments that come from other types of experience (for example, from the positive sciences and the natural worldview) and even universal logical principles, in short, any sentence and consequence obtained not by directly grasping of the essence of the facts, reach the concreteness of the thing itself. Because they are indirect and *ad extra* indications or nominations of the thing presented, the latter must resort to signs and other forms of indirect indications. In a word, symbols. In the context of scientific knowledge, the notion of symbol has the meaning of a hypothetical instrument of naming, artificially constructed, of a specific science to indicate its object (Scheler, 2008f). What distinguishes symbols, however, is neither the artificiality of their construction nor their belonging to this kind of knowledge, since symbolization is also inherent in the natural experience of the world. The characteristic of symbolic indication is that the intentionality of the acts, through which objects are conceived, aims at a plus, that is, they aim at the fact of knowing, which, however, goes beyond the content of the acts and their execution, since this can only take place completely and concretely in the immanence of phenomenological experience. By symbolically indicating, the concretely given is taken into account, but this is only shown as a transcendent fact. At the root of symbolization, then, is a meaning or intending that transcends (*Hinausmeinen*) to something that surpasses its content, that is, that knowing that occurs through the transcendence of acts directed at facts that, in reference to what is given only to the essential intuition, are transcendent in phenomenological terms. Symbols are therefore, in relation to facts, signs that “they are never present in themselves or self-given” (Scheler, 2008f: 457, translated by me), although the facts do not disappear completely. From the point of view of the acts, they are contents placed as signs for this givenness that they themselves cannot immediately grasp. In this sense, symbols are the fruit of modes of knowing whose vision is essentially restricted to the giving of the things themselves. To a certain extent, they are blind to them, as they are incapable of grasping and thematizing their givenness. Despite this, they are knowing of facts, for which the latter are necessarily given, however, and mediately grasped. They are forms of knowledge that always refer to the giving of things themselves, insofar as they are presupposed as the ontological basis of their judgments, concepts, and definitions. Since it is through phenomenological experience that these indirect resources of naming acquire a final fulfillment through the presentation of the thing named, in and of itself, it is only through this that these symbolic indications become full of meaning. Through it, therefore, the vague data of these modalities of indirect determination of the thing itself is in fact transformed into data of intuition.

Because it is rooted in materiality, in the concrete giving of the thing itself, phenomenological experience is therefore *non-symbolic* and, as such, the only one “able to fulfill *all* possible symbols” (Scheler, 2000: 70; 1973: 51). If such an experience is phenomenology taking place, it must be added that phenomenology is also “non-symbolic” in its course, but because it is configured as a possibility and mode of knowledge linked without mediation to “objective” facts and, likewise, full of notions whose meaning does not lose sight of the fulfillment of the givenness of these facts. On the contrary, it is knowing that in this reference is preserved and completed as an unparalleled experience in relation to the other experiences of other forms of knowledge. In all this, phenomenology is itself the phenomenon of a concrete “science”. At this point, we should remember the leitmotif of this investigation: “In no case does apriorism lead to idealism”. Apriorism, in this phenomenological sense, is what should lead us to the knowledge of a concrete “science”, about both its acts and its objects in the materiality of their qualities and quiddities, or even the eidetic correlation of both, including the content of the notions and the judgments that arise from them.

As an *a priori* fact, it is materiality that gives objectivity and necessity to knowledge, in fact, in an experiential horizon prior to any universal judgment, before any determination of necessity in the field of pure logic. However, the materiality of facts is also not identified with the opposite pole, that is, with any casual data arising from sensation (the result of pure receptivity, in the Kantian sense). On the basis of this formalist conception of knowing and, respectively, of materiality (of sensations), phenomenology would lose not only the concreteness of the content of its notions and principles, denouncing that the seeing of essences that characterizes it would not be so translucent, due to the interference of functions of the lived body. It would also, and above all, be deprived of the concreteness of the immediate data from which it must always start. Suspending this formalist understanding, materiality should instead be considered to be the content of phenomenological intuition, the apprehension of which is independent of any instinct, impulse, or more precisely, the co-action of the sensory functions of the lived body in gathering the meaning of the thing to be known – of what it shows in itself. As the materiality of knowing, then, facts are not relativities conditioned to the contingencies of sensation and the spatio-temporal positioning of the lived body in the midst of things, nor are they primarily referred to the I that inhabits it entirely and in each and every one of its members.

Before all this, materiality belongs, above all, to the sphere of spiritual relations with things themselves, because the spirit is precisely this experience of existential independence

from any and all psychophysical determination of the human being and their relationship with the world (Scheler, 2008b). And in the sphere of the spiritual being, the division between the internal and external worlds, the self provided with interiority and bodies provided solely with extension, fall to the ground. In fact, the spiritual person, with the world that they alone are capable of opening up, is an integral totality. This division is, in other words, an opposition that places thought, with its forms and spontaneity, on the one hand, and sensitivity, with its receptivity, on the other. Outside of this opposition, the very fact of knowledge is not, at first, a formless materiality, as if facts were incapable of giving themselves as something that, from the outset, presents itself in an absolute way - and this already applies to perceptual acts, not just theoretical-cognitive ones. Materiality is already pregnant with forms, which can be (re)collected in repeated insights of the essence of objects together with their being. In this sense, materiality should also be understood as “objectivity”, “thinghood” (*Sachlichkeit*), that is, that determinant of the suchness such of things from within themselves, to which man's spiritual existence is indelibly attached. Scheler (2008b) asserts that it is only the spiritual being that experiences things in their “objectivity” (in the sense of thingness, *Sachlichkeit*), because it is from the pure apprehension of the way of being of things that the drama of man's elevation above his physiopsychological constitution begins and is consummated in the final act. To become the spiritual person that he is, then, man needs to be intimately related to the materiality (as *Sachlichkeit*) of things, noteworthy, in a pure way and in an essential anteriority, precisely by virtue of that detachment of the spirit from the organic.

As a result, once again, materiality cannot be reduced to the chaotic data of sensation. If they were just this chaotic mass, relating to the sense organs, the material data of knowledge would not be strictly *a priori*. They would only be what they are for the modern theory of knowledge: arbitrary constructions of human understanding, achieved by virtue of a formative and synthetic activity inherent in thinking as the principle of ensuring their objectivity. Thus, only after being thought by an in-forming, con-forming, molding thought, subjugated to the pure representations of human understanding, would the materiality of knowing acquire evidence; the objective clarity of its facts, therefore, would only emerge *a posteriori*, after being explained by the forms and laws of thought. From this perspective, which identifies the *a priori* only with the categorical structures of reason, only with the rational element of knowing and the forms of pure sensibility, in short, with the formal, the phenomenon of materiality is only something *a posteriori*. As such, it cannot be accepted as a guide to phenomenological experience or to the elevation of the human spirit to purer and more absolute spheres of being.

In the horizon of phenomenological experience, then, there is something pure and absolute in the matter of knowledge, capable of leading it and, in this leading, elevating it above all the factualities that emerge from observation and induction, so that it can remain only with the thing itself. The materiality of facts, in this understanding, does not oppose the possibility of knowing, but favors it; instead of allowing a downward movement, trapping it in the weight of casualties, it makes knowledge ascend towards essences. Cognitive relations with the entity will be aprioristic if the giving of the meaning of materiality becomes more and more evident, regardless of whether it is an epistemological, ethical-axiological¹, or aesthetic doctrine.

¹ At this point, an example can be introduced here, given by Scheler (2000: 79-80), which belongs to the ethical field of knowledge. However, what the author calls into question is also valid for the theoretical dimension, since an *a priori* materiality belongs to both spheres of phenomenological experience, or because apriorism is inherent in the whole internal structure of this experience. Translating the example, the will is more energetic the more it loses itself in the materiality that corresponds to it, namely the axiological. This loss does not mean that it is ruined in self-love, as Kant (1974b: 128) would have it, based on the assumption that it would have its motive in the pleasure of the object's effectiveness, then, in empirical elements that would only be represented as pleasant or unpleasant circumstantially and according to the subject's sensitive states. Against this sensualist perspective, the opposite and unthinking side of the formalist determination of pure will, determinable in itself only in the feeling of respect for the law and in reference to duty as duty, it is possible to allege some facts of lived experience with their own evidence. In this direction, human beings capable of a noble will are very often absorbed by the value of the good they are aiming for, they strive and dedicate themselves, often without looking at themselves, at their states of mind, especially the sensitive ones, to the point of giving themselves over to dangerous situations in order to achieve the desired good, which becomes the "object of their desire" or volition. They launch themselves fearlessly, "without looking back", into their feeling states, towards the goal of their action. However, this intentional movement "forward" is made by the gift of the value present in the good they are aiming for. So, without the slightest presentation of the value of the good, if it doesn't given a singular axiological materiality, of course, to be perceived by acts or a very special feeling that corresponds to it in an essential intentional and *a priori* correlation, the will doesn't move, man doesn't open up to the good. A will without the material of what desired, resolutely directed towards this end, is only a desire that is generally wanted from what is good for the subject. Therefore, a will that doesn't lose itself in the axiological matter that awakens and moves it. In this way, they are deprived, to a minimal degree, of the evidence that comes from giving away the value of the good they want. Therefore, it doesn't know the reason for its volition, it doesn't know the good it wants or the reason for recognizing it as worthy of being sought. This is the situation of the desire that wants only itself, as well as of a will, in Kantian terms, that can only be determined in itself and only from itself. A good and noble will, therefore, is not necessarily one that is unshakable in its own efforts, strong in wanting something for its own sake - for this will can still be poor in evidence about what it wants - but one that is rooted in the material data of the intuition of a value to which it has become awakened. As such, it remains attached to the very fact of its desire. In this way, ethical behavior, if it stems from authentic discernment, that founded on the intuition of value, presupposes acts of a "passionate" will, totally guided by the axiological content that materially presents itself in goods, constantly refusing the objectification of their value, for example, by holding back in the question and observation of how that value and its qualities resonate in itself as a sensible state, thus evaluating, in a hesitant way, whether it is worthy of surrendering to it. The less attached to oneself, to one's affective states, the more the will rises, as it allows human beings to act only on the basis of what they see and discern from the fact of wanting by means of intellections. Thus, this attachment to the materiality of the facts of the will is the condition for liberating and elevating oneself. For it is in this being bound, that is, in this being open and directed towards the matter of fact, that man as a moral subject grasps, ever more clearly, the givenness of that which makes something or someone a good worthy of being loved. In other words, moral action requires a knowledge that is synonymous with the immediate intuition of values, of their hierarchical relationships, which implies an essential relationship with their material content. In short, the example says: it is not in the feeling of respect for the law as an undeniable fact of reason, therefore, on a purely formal level, that reason determines itself; rather, it is through a love of the matter

However, in search of the original meaning of the *a priori*, we are revolving around the thesis that apriorism in no way leads to formalism. For this reason, we must point to the reasons why, precisely in the quest to ground knowing in its finite possibility, this equation has been idealistically consecrated. In other words, we need to place ourselves, in a way, outside the phenomenological experience, even if only to understand the need to insert knowledge within its scope and, under its parameter, to demarcate the scope of certain ways of knowing, at the same time as the meaning of apriorism in the sciences. For, in a strict sense, knowledge is neither limited (by forms of pure reason that predetermine *a priori* what we can know), nor relative (to the merely sensible). The limitation of knowing is due, rather, to what is given and how it is given and, above all, to the boundaries of its reception, which occurs mainly when we go beyond the scope of the experience of giving something absolute and apprehending and conceiving of this data without the mediation of signs or symbols. On the other hand, it is from the essence and meaning of the modalities of knowing that the boundaries are shown to be limited and its data relative. Not knowing as such. Under the heading of apriorism and knowledge, let's take another circle around our problem.

4. Apriorism and knowledge

Before anything can be said in an attempt to clarify the apriority of pure, formalist knowing, it is necessary to reduce the notion of knowledge, which ultimately means removing its meaning from the pre-understanding that identifies it with representation. We need to take it back to its idea, to its fundamental meaning, apprehended within the phenomenological framework in which this discussion moves in circles. But we only do this by means of a vague indication. Now, any form of cognition and knowledge that arises from it is a relation with the known. In modern terms, it is one between subject and object. The question is, however, whether it is permissible to interpret this relation as a mere natural, "spontaneous" connection between what is psychological and inner and what is objective and outer. It certainly isn't, precisely because it is radically *a priori*, which formal and idealist thought already knew, because otherwise the cognitive relation wouldn't have its beginning, ultimately, in the spontaneity of the understanding or in its ability to produce concepts and representations. As a

of the facts of its will, within the phenomenological experience of values. In this, matter is an undeniably *a priori* guide to (ethical) knowledge.

representation, the cognitive relation is the activity by which the subject (a)presents the known to itself and for itself, conceiving it according to the forms and laws of its understanding. In this direction, there is always the risk of the known becoming a part of the knowing subject or, at the very least, reducing the known only to that residue that takes part and can take part in knowing according to the specific perspective of representations. If, however, we take the direction of an ontological-phenomenological measure of knowledge, in the breadth of a semantic scope that applies to all kinds of knowledge, as Scheler (2008a) does, the cognitive relation is a participation in the known and knowable, but, in such a way, nothing in it is modified, because it is not a spatial, temporal or causal participation, but one that is made possible and favored by the suchness of things that, by giving of themselves, enter into the relation and become *ens intentionale*. In this condition or figuration, this making possible says that things are in spirit, that is, that their suchness is *in mente*. However, they remain in themselves. In this way, they are *in re*, necessarily existing outside of the cognitive relation, previously experienced as the resistance that is imposed in the face of the human being's drive for life, as the moment of experiencing effective reality (Scheler, 2008b). At the same time, they are both *extra mente*, persisting in their own existence, and *in mente*, that is, as an intentional "object", when reality is conceived through the work of the spirit, by detaching itself and rising above the vital impulses of the psychophysical dimension. Consequently, the actual reality of the being to be known does not come into play in the cognitive relation; its coefficient of reality is suspended (for us) and then reduced to its suchness.

In this way, knowledge (*Wissen*) is a *Seinsverhältnis*¹, a relation of being (of the knower or the one who knows as a spiritual person) to (the) being (of the known), which is therefore

¹ *Verhältnis* is translated as relation, a term that has already been used to describe knowledge, because knowledge is a human way of (be)having with beings, in other words, of putting oneself in reference to them. The word "relation" is certainly inadequate to denote the various significant nuances involved in the german word. Firstly, it should be remembered that *Verhältnis* is commonly used to signify the bond between people of a loving kind. It therefore reveals an intimate bond, a loving relationship. Its meaning, according to the *Deutsches Wörterbuch von Jacob und Wilhelm Grimm* (*Verhältnis*, s.d.), developed from a notion of (*sich*) *verhalten* (have an attitude towards..., to behave with...), which also includes the meanings of *verwahren* (to protect, to safeguard, to guard, to defend, to safeguard), *bewahren* (to protect, to conserve, to keep sth. alive) and *erhalten* (the receiving that preserves or maintains what has been received). In this way, the word relation should be understood in the sense of an "inner" connection between knowledge and the known, established on the ontological horizon in which one is for the other in an offering way or, from the angle of the human person or the knower, in a loving dedication. It is a relation endowed with a fundamental receptivity, that is, an active receptivity as an essential feature of the being of the knower. Through this trait, the knower not only fulfills the act of receiving the being of the known, but also preserves and protects it in an essential way, that is, he protects the known by preserving that "being-in-such-a-way" which it properly is, the "suchness" of its self-giving. Originally, knowing does not imprint its laws on the known, nor does it make an image of it according to these laws and categories. Thus, in a formal sense, the cognitive relation can also be said to be love.

eminently ontological in character: “Knowledge is a *being relation* – namely a relation of being that presupposes the forms of being of whole and part. It is the relation of the *partaking* (*Teilhabe*) of one entity in the suchness of another entity, through which no alteration whatsoever is placed in this being-such-as (*Sosein*)” (Scheler, 2008a: 203, translated by me). In other words, it is a spiritual attitude, receptive and attuned by nature to what is manifested, which allows the suchness of the thing known to give itself as it really is, and not in any other way. Every attitude has a perspective of self-fulfillment, through which it stops referring to the being to which it is attentive. In the case of knowledge, it is an attunement of thought and intuition, of “making an image” for oneself of what is known insofar as it grasps its meaning, in short, the meaning of the reality of things. On different levels, thanks to this significant attunement, knowledge corresponds to the sense of the existence of the known, depending on how much the intuitively thought identifies with the thing acted upon. Thus, if it is genuine, knowing does not invent forms, nor does it shape or mold the known entity with these forms, but it gathers them in a significant and immediately intellectual seeing; this seeing is reading the very meaning of the reality of the known; without deforming it, but extracting its significant forms from it. However, it is necessary to see the phenomenon from the pole of the act of knowing, from the very act of behaving towards... From this point of view, the relation is the tendency and “impulse” of knowing to come out of itself and go towards the entity in order to partake in its being, because without this philosophical movement, which leads to taking part in the latter, this would not be converted into *ens intentionale*. And the root and motor for the consummation of this act of directing oneself, warns Scheler (2008a: 204), “can only be the *participation* (*Teilnahme*) that transcends its own being, which we call ‘love’ in the most formal sense”. In its intentionality, the essence of knowledge manifests itself as love; it is wanting to participate in the being of its object, letting it appear without impurities or distortions, without additions, in short, representations. In love, therefore, the essence of knowledge, whether theoretical or practical, is a “volition” that the being manifests itself in the way it is, a totally *a priori* implication (of its being) with this event.

The above description makes it a little easier to understand why the meaning of the *a priori* is understood and explained from the phenomenological experience, precisely from its interiority, taking into account the totality of its structural elements. In short, in order not to fall into a formalist determination of apriorism, the problem needs to be brought back to a doctrine, founded on that experience, of the original apprehension of possible knowledge data, above all of their (self-)givenness. In this way, not only is the existence and possibility of a type of

knowledge essentially *a priori* presupposed, but it is necessarily bound to the content or matter of the data apprehended through phenomenological intuition, so that, thanks to this connection, this type of knowledge makes up a distinct and distinguished knowledge through participation in the absolute reality of its “object” (*Gegenstand*) (Scheler, 2008a: 209; 2008e: 394-395) – philosophy as phenomenology. But also, with this measure given by the partaking that doesn't modify what is known, the ontological criterion is established for the elucidation of the various forms of knowledge which, in summary, are: the natural worldview, the sciences, philosophy and, beyond the latter, metaphysical knowledge, understood by Scheler (2008c) in the direction of a participation, based on man's free decision, in the divine and, therefore, arising not only from the cognitive apprehension of a very first and absolute being, but primarily from the cognitive apprehension of a very first and absolute being.

Through this criterion, then, the way is opened up for determining the limits of each of the forms of knowledge and, based on this, the collaboration between them, avoiding the one-sidedness that is always problematic when one form predominates in the formation of culture and in the destiny of civilizations. But what is this criterion? Synthetically, in Scheler's words (2008e: 398, translated by me), “The absolute criterion for every ‘cognition’ (*Erkenntnis*) is and remains the self-givenness (*Selbstgegebenheit*) of the facts”. Admittedly, this criterion does not only include the giving of the facts, although this is a central point and a determining condition. It also presupposes an intuition devoid of forms, capable of comprehensively perceiving, in an original seeing (*Ersehen*), the meaning of the presentation of what is given from itself, precisely so that the content of something, through its self-presentation, can be donated as pure essence. Thus, at the same time, the above norm pre-establishes a benchmark for demarcating the limits and potential of knowledge: the congruence or correspondence of seeing with what is given. In terms of tradition, the adequacy of knowledge is presupposed, but not in the sense of the correctness of judgments in relation to the represented object, but of an experience or continuity of seeing experiences, along which we arrive at full correspondence with what is given or, in other words, the identification between pure acts and intuited data from their self-giving. The in-between of this aprioristic relation of (full) correspondence and identification between grasping and the grasped, knowing and its object, is called the “absolute existence” of the given as an *a priori* and material fact of knowledge. Indicating the content of the givenness of facts in the immanence of phenomenological experience, it could also simply be called a phenomenon.

Consequently, modes of knowledge whose content does not result from the full reduction and total adequacy to the content of the self-giving of facts in their materiality “possess”, in their acts, only what is called the “relative existence” of their objects. For these modalities, objects are essentially given, but their existence is determined according to the “form”, direction, and quality of the acts that conceive them and, therefore, depending on the relations with that which supports these acts, that is, the knowing subject. As a result, the determination and construction of such objects are restricted, at different levels, to the organization of human life in the unity of its psychophysical dimension, which, as such, is the carrier of the constituent acts. In this way, they do not originate from an evidentiating seeing proper to the spirit, from a sighting of man as a spiritual being, but are totally dependent on the sighting of a finite carrier of acts as a living being. In the case of the natural worldview, their content is totally dependent on the structure of living in its direction towards the surrounding and internal world and, therefore, on the experiences of the body itself or living experience (*Erlebnis*) (Scheler, 2008e). The content of the realm of objects of natural vision, then, is conditioned by the structural totality of the experiences that distinguish the life of the human being in particular, but also of a certain group or an era, in such a way that one can speak, for example, of a knowledge specific to an ethnic group, to a certain culture, as well as relating to a particular way of “perceiving” the objects of the internal and external world that differs between men and women.

The sciences, on the other hand, by being aprioristic knowledge, seem to overcome this conditioning, since they don't have empirical facts as the condition for their possibility. However, the content of their objects remains that of a relative existence and, as such, linked to the experiential structure of the human being. It is true that the sciences' starting point for determining their objects is not sensory perception, but the reduction of the realm of objects from the natural worldview to a pure state of affairs (*Sachverhalt*), according to principles of selecting them, particular to each science. The “facts” of a specific science are, in fact, a set of *a priori* determinations regarding how things already given in the realm of objects of the natural worldview behave, but constructed by means of enlightening admissions about what the thing or event that it intends to explain would be based on universal laws (Scheler, 2008e, 2008f). Therefore, the objects of the sciences do not need to be empirically accessible to sensory perception. In this way, it would seem that the object of the sciences is something essentially given. However, they do not make the thing itself, immediately given, or the event itself their object. For the sciences, things and events are not fully evidently given; they are only constructed and mediately thought, as in the Kantian formulation, based on the purely formal

laws of the understanding. Because of the lack of this immediacy based on the self-givenness (*Selbstgegebenheit*) of facts in their materiality, the objects of the sciences have an existential relativity that refers to the organization of human life. However, an important caveat must be made: “They are not relative to the organization of the *species homo*, but - referred to *all possible living organizations* and their organizational differences – must be considered as ‘absolute’ objects (*Gegenstand*)” (Scheler, 2008e: 405, translate by me). Consequently, they are linked to the body and to human living, insofar as these show a perception, a sensitivity to the excitement of the realities present in the world of the natural worldview or of a movement, but insofar as these lived dimensions with their functions are seen and understood in their *general* aspect, valid for all the experiential structures of human beings or human groups. Thus, the existence of the objects of science remains tied to life, seen in its essence (Scheler, 2008e). In this sense, the objects of science are only less relative in their existence than those of the natural worldview. The difference between the two modalities does not lie, therefore, in the demarcation of the limits of knowledge as such, but rather in the relativity of the existence of the object of each of them. The difference therefore lies in the degree of relativity, with the existence of the objects of the sciences being less relative. To this extent, it is less symbolic, although precisely because of this characteristic, scientific knowledge loses sight of the richness and breadth of the realm of objects in the natural worldview.

Because they are a less symbolic form of knowledge, would the sciences be the form of knowledge closest to the aforementioned criterion, which defines knowledge in its essence and in its most original possibility? Remember, the self-givenness of facts is the measure of this criterion, so that the levels or forms of knowledge indicate degrees of participation in the absolute reality of their “object”. From the outset, the answer is clearly negative. This denial can be shown by rephrasing the above question in terms of the adequacy of knowledge: are the sciences the way of knowledge that most corresponds to what is given in itself as a material fact? Well, the objects of the sciences are of relative existence, that is, they are not accessible to the presence of a pure essence as the giving of an absolute being. On the contrary, they represent the kind of knowledge that, according to the ideal and phenomenological measure, results from a knowing that is constituted and guaranteed in essential distance from the self-givenness of the things themselves. In the opposite direction and in a decisive departure from this phenomenon, particular science constructs its “facts” as a symbol of the thing itself, based on an emptying of the givenness of what is present on the horizon of the natural experience of the world. At the end of this movement of formalization, its object is just a remnant of the

purification of what is material in everything that is given to man. Precisely, it is a sign that is totally external to the appearance of an absolute datum, of the phenomenon in the strict sense of the term – which is of fundamental importance for clarifying the meaning of the problem around which we revolve and, in particular, demonstrating that formalism (in the Kantian sense) and apriorism are not to be confused. In this way, considering the differences in the adequacy of knowledge to its objects in the various forms of knowledge and, as a result, the levels of relativity/absoluteness of their existence, through which an order of mutual delimitation and cooperation is established (knowledge of lesser adequacy, in the formation of the culture of a people or of the whole of Western civilization, should serve the modalities of adequacy in absolute measure, as a function of the realization of man's nature as a spiritual person), scientific knowledge is that which is located at the lowest level. It is this position that is singled out as the quality “less symbolic” of the structure of scientific knowledge. Consequently, in this specific situation, “less symbolic” is, however paradoxical it may seem at first glance, the genre of knowledge whose realm of objects is most lacking in the possibility of being affected by the appearance of things and events through and in the course of the self-giving of the things themselves.

In relation to this source and principle of fully adequate knowledge, the sciences are necessarily “empty” of matter, although rich in “pure forms”. These, however, are the general laws by which the objectivity of reality is guaranteed. This becomes clearer if we consider the difference between the phenomenological reduction – which launches knowing into the interiority of phenomenological experience – and that operated by the sciences. The first one places itself next to the symbols of the natural worldview, on the horizon in which the symbols are signs that point both to the thing being sighted and to the function of the lived body and the acts through which it is sighted – for example, sensitive perception – for example, sensitive perception. Starting from these facts symbolically given to the bodily senses, the phenomenological reduction shows itself as the seeing that enters into their appearance, not denying it, but bringing it back to its own content, even leaving behind all the forms of presentation that are correlative to functions of the lived body. So to speak, the phenomenological reduction penetrates the appearance of the given – for instance, of a visible thing –, toward its self-givenness, so that it becomes directly visible, without any mediation between the intentional act of seeing and the mode of being that gives itself in the thing as intended through the sense of vision. Thus, it is the intellectual effort and operation of an essential and intuitive seeing (*Ein-sicht, in-sight*) which, by penetrating the forms of

appearances apprehended by natural experience, discerns the meaning of the thing perceived. In this way, the “object”, constituted by the phenomenological reduction, is what is given in itself.

The “scientific reduction” also leaves behind all the appearances of the data present on the horizon of natural experience, likewise stripping its object of all the qualities and properties that only appear by virtue of a function of sensible perception. However, it does so until the sensible fact appears in correlation with a lived condition belonging to an “observer” in general, and therefore valid for any and all others. The reduction carried out at the base of scientific knowledge, in order to constitute the sphere of “things” particular to each science and to explain the state or way of behaving of those who fall within it, annihilates all appearances concretely determined by the ideal forms already present in them, going back to a form of reason as the condition of possibility of any and all appearances. Instead of penetrating the appearance of the thing itself towards its meaning, the sciences externalize it. In other words, the forms of appearances, still vividly collected in natural experience, need to disappear with their own content, so that what is given remains only as a purely objective reality. What is perceived in a sensible perception, scientifically reduced, is what is there to exist objectively, and, as such, is the sign that is completely external to its self-giving (Scheler, 2008f). It is a “thing” artificially produced by the knowing subject as a percipient. In this way, the object of the sciences is what is aimed at in a (less) symbolic way, still according to human vital organization in its generality, but with an important difference: it is presented not from itself, but through the artificial construction of a sign that points to the self-giving of its facts as a totally transcendent and therefore unknown founding element. As such, the construct doesn't “speak” much about the thing itself and from there, it is a symbol with little evocative content.

Let's stay on the horizon of sensitive givenness to explain an important development of the problem around which we revolve. Because of the methodological construction by which the object of natural vision is cleansed of any sensible content, sensible facts are interpreted as a formless and chaotic mass of data obtained mediately through the bodily senses. Moreover, their meaning and content is only the result of the application of *a priori* forms of the understanding. However, this sensualist way of arguing fails to realize that the sensible is merely, among other things, the way in which a certain content is addressed to us, the way in which the content of something is already given to a human being, even if only symbolically (Scheler, 2008f). Sensible and sensible data are not concepts that should be forcibly introduced into what is presented to us. In fact, this violence happens at the expense of the assumption that

sensible perception is the horizon of mere receptivity, that is, the *locus* of human's affectation by sensible things, in which the ideal forms present in the sensible would not be at work, demanding from him an active idealizing posture, therefore the *locus* of a receptivity depreciated to the character of instinctive. On the contrary, in the sensible appearances of a certain object, the self-giving of things is imbued as an originary action that asks man to capture it through acts of sensible perception in order to constitute its object, even though this ontological inherence only becomes evident through phenomenological reduction and analysis. In this sense, purifying objects or constituting them through this formal-idealist purification, carried out methodically according to the rigor of the least symbolic knowledge possible (in the sense of the sciences), is to allow the existence of objects to come to us only through artificial construction, using the interposition between the act and the thing itself of a construct that defines by anticipation the way of being of what affects the human being in his experience with the things that surround him. This anticipation hides the fact that what is called sensible is precisely that which, first and foremost, gives of itself and affects us on a daily and almost instantaneous basis, without the permeation of artifice.

It's true that this is extremely advantageous for discovering rules for what comes to us here and now in a contingent way, leading to something (artificially) pure and thus invariable. And if this discovery is made through countless observations and measurements, perfected over the course of history and the progress of scientific knowledge, it is a time-consuming procedure that has proved, throughout its development, to be extremely useful for the control and mastery of natural reality. This effectiveness, however, can conceal man's inability to (allow himself to) be actively affected by the facts of knowledge in its materiality, be it theoretical, ethical-practical, or aesthetic. Here, we can speak of a deficient way, typical of modern man, of stopping, with the mediation of scientific knowledge, close to what touches us everywhere from its self-giving. However, what comes to us on a daily basis is marked by the character of contingency, impermanence, and irregularity. Faced with this character, according to the predominant tendency since modernity to have the being by the way of holding on to it and privileging what is regular, pure, and constant, a trait of aversion to what does not show these aspects would stand out. Now, from the point of view of a rationality that organizes and forms the reality through the use of its invariable laws and *a priori* concepts, the sensible is predetermined as a chaotic heap of data. In fact, it takes it as the result of their mere excitation of the instincts of the human body, disregarding the fact that the human senses and feelings have their own specific intentionality. From this perspective, the sciences, especially if exalted

unilaterally as the only rigorous way of cultivating both the internal and external worlds of human being, are the exercise of the power of a vital organism that can and, since modern times, has wanted “apply only to those elements and aspects of the real world that recur in a uniform manner according to the rule ‘similar causes, similar effects’” (Scheler, 2008c: 77, translated by me). If thought of from the point of view of the human being's spiritual dimension, which implies the movement of an essential detachment from his psychophysical reality of the organism, this power represents an impoverishment of the inherent capacity of the human being in its specificity in relation to other living beings, namely that of grasping what is pure and ideal in the constant change of sensible reality. Thus, it is also configured as a typical enmity of the modern human being towards the sensible, which requires stripping it of all the pure forms that immerse themselves in it and, through the presence of the sensible thing, give themselves to us, reaching us, revealing to us an order already present in the external world. Through this hostile aversion to the sensible, this is converted into a “materiality” that holds nothing essential for us. Translating this attitude, the meaning behind the conception of the apriority of knowledge emerges from a formalist and sensualist interpretation:

This “attitude” I can only describe as a basic “hostility” toward or “distrust” of the given as such, a fear of the given as “chaos,” an anxiety – an attitude that can be expressed as “the world outside me, nature within me.” “Nature” is what is to be formed, to be organized, to be “controlled”; it is the “hostile,” the “chaos,” etc. Hence this attitude is the opposite of love of the world, of trust in and loving devotion to the world. Strictly speaking, this attitude belongs only to modern times, which are permeated by a hatred of the world, a hostility toward the world, and a distrust of it, and by the consequence of this hatred: namely, the limitless need for activity to “organize” and “control” the world, which this combination of apriorism and the theory of a “forming,” “lawmaking” understanding (and a “will of reason” that brings drives into an “order”) has psychologically caused. And all of this has culminated in the mind of an ingenious philosopher. (Scheler, 2000: 86; 1973: 67)

As a result of this spiritual attitude typical of modernity, apriorism would have been identified exclusively with formalism. However, this angry and hostile attitude would have led to the conception of *a priori* and apriority based on the capacity and power of human reason to order, control, and, in short, dominate the facts and data of human experience. The originary meaning, however, should be taken from the spirit's forms of thought and intuition, not so much from the spontaneous activity of synthetic force, in a word, (in)forming or shaping the data of

intuition, understood as the characteristic property of human reason according to the idealist understanding. In this way, the *a priori* is not a construct of reason, nor does it define the subjective function of elaborating and organizing the data of experience, conceptions that presuppose the modern functionalization and subjectivization of the spirit, already interpreted as a structure peculiar to the psychophysical ego. Considering human spirituality, however, the first is the potential of the human being to take part in the thingness (*Dingheit*) of things and (co)participate in the realization of the acts of other humans, in fact, allowing everything to emerge, grow and take effect from its value and essence through the act of love or, on the contrary, through hating, rejecting or belittling the giving of beings from what it is and is worth, - an event that includes in itself an endless plurality of forms and ways. Despite the above diagnosis and the harmful consequences it alludes to, there is still one positive aspect. Let's summarize it. *A priori* is not the human being's openness to beings that occurs as a positioning of reason that places itself as the condition of possibility for all representation, just as it places the being in its being as represented. Rather, it is openness, understood as something proper to the being of the human being as a spiritual person, which takes part in the being of the entity, allowing it to appear according to its essence. *A priori*, then, is the spirit's act of love.

5. Conclusion

In light of this result, let's reconsider one last time the criterion that defines the essence of knowledge in general, in order to move towards a previous conclusion. The criterion imposes the measure of the givenness of essences – a donation that is both eidetic and material – as true facts of knowledge. Because it is independent of a series of observations and breaks with the observation of contingencies, of occurrences that are always perceived as relative to the psychophysical constitution of the observing subject with their perspective, it is the givenness of an absolute datum. At the same time, the criterion serves to discern levels or types of knowledge. In this way, the more capable it is of meeting this criterion, the more apt the knowledge will be for realizing the idea or meaning of knowing. Instead of being defined on the basis of its ability to order sensible data, formally and artificially constituting its object on the basis of acts of pure thinking or pure will, it will be defined according to the internal possibility of partaking in the being of the known. Correspondingly, it will be characterized by its ability to see in a translucent way what is shown as the absolute being of its “object”. For it is this vision that allows the latter

to give itself as an “absolute existence”. This doesn't mean that accepting this vision gives the known its absolute existence, but only gives it the possibility of making itself visible in it, constituting itself as a phenomenon. In other words, the more intellects are given to knowing that capture, from intuitions of fundamental evidence, the materiality of its facts, with ever greater purity and absoluteness, the nobler the form or type of knowledge will be. Correlatively, the more appropriate the title of *a priori* will be to the cognition (*Erkenntnis*) that underlies a given form of knowledge (*Wissen*). Consequently, the highest types of knowledge are those capable of penetrating the materiality of their facts. Above all, they will be those that make it evident, in the way they are realized, that “all true apriority is insofar essential apriority” (Scheler, 2007: 98, translated by me).

On the other hand, it is undeniable that *a priori* can also be the character of knowledge resulting from the reduction particular to the sciences. However, such apriority imposes itself at the cost of denying the knower the essential intuition and the ability to see the intuited, the one who penetrates the thing itself and defines the forms of appearance from an absolute datum. Obsessed with the goal of discovering invariable laws or guided by a vision that is blind to the self-giving of things, scientific knowing despises the ideal forms that present themselves, before anything else, in the realm of sensible data. For this reason, this apriority is analogous to that which is essential; it distinguishes knowledge that selects aspects of what is given, on the transcendental horizon, as existence relative to the lived body as such, in dependence on the psychophysical structure of the knowing subject. According to this analogous sense, the scientific conception of *a priori* has the meaning of the principle of selecting certain objective characteristics with the aim of artificially constructing the object of knowledge and, in the end, favoring its mastery (Scheler, 2008a, 2008e).

The noblest knowledge worthy of the name aprioristic is that of essences, therefore, philosophical knowledge; the most noble, in turn, would be metaphysical one or knowledge of salvation, because it is the only one whose “object” is the idea of a maximally absolute being, capable of fulfilling the criterion of adequacy and imposing the ultimate limit on the possibility of corresponding to the giving of an absolutely existing being (the idea of the divine). In order to justify such nobility, these kinds of knowledge must arrive at the intuition of the pure and full content of their “object” or intentional reality (in the sense that also includes moral and aesthetic values, but also that which escapes any objectification, acts, whose reality is the execution of themselves). To this end, apprehended from its idea and meaning, according to which *apriorism* is defined in its essential meaning, knowing must start from no less than the

immediate intuition and clear intellection that what is aimed at is or exists from the self-evidencing of its being. This is the primordial fact that, in the face of any being, is nothingness, but not the nothingness of the non-being, but rather that which shows itself, in the first and fundamental intellection of philosophical knowing, as “something” not yet split off from the entity, but together with its presence and its essence, that is, the way it is being, concretely, and not from another. It is, then, the absolute nothingness that is the object of evident intellection and philosophical wonder that comes to speech in the following judgment: “not nothing is” (Scheler, 2007: 93, translated by me). At the same time, he needs to progress in the clarity of this intellection, eliminating ever more the split between the essential and the empirical, the casual and the necessary. It is obliged to make this progression in order to reach the point where the vision of the essence corresponds to the evidence of the thing present in itself and by itself as an absolute being, to an *ens pro se* and, at the highest level, fully *a priori*, to the knowledge of the essence that necessarily implies, then, not occasionally, that of the existence of the entity in question (Scheler, 2007). This march and advance towards the most clear intellection, however, already includes halfway - between the first intellection of the essence and the third and final intellection of the absolute existence of the essent (realizable entirely in the idea of the divine) – the “positivity” of the fact, in its materiality, giving itself as the light of absolute being, as the abyssal depth of a “reality” admirable for the fact that it is by itself. For, already at the beginning of the path towards the maximally intelligible and towards the first intellection of the most immediate evidence, the “abyss of absolute nothingness” (Scheler, 2007: 93, translated by me) is seen next to a single example of a being.

In this way, in the order of knowing, defined based on the degree of intellection of essences, anteriority or apriority concerns, above all, the liberation of knowledge from the contingencies of its object and, correspondingly, from the living body that apprehends in a restricted way what is given, because its objects are only the data whose existence is relative to it or to its impulses and perceptive functions, towards the stage where knowing is granted the ability to reach the presence of things, in and of themselves. This is the level at which they are already there, everywhere and every day, giving of themselves and in themselves to us, but to the extent that we position ourselves in front of them in the face of this primordial fact as the spiritual beings that we are. In view of the spirituality of the human person, it can be said that anteriority belongs, first and foremost, to the giving of essences as the primary and irrefutable matter of human knowledge and cognition, as well as of the human person's actions, valuations, and delight in what is beautiful and good. *A priori*, in the final instance, are the facts; it is they

who have primacy. Cognition and knowledge can never deviate from them. And if they do, it's because they transcend beyond phenomenological experience by disregarding the guidance of insights as immediate seeing of essences and the intuition of them. Otherwise, they go astray because they are incapable of loving their facts, that is, to participate in what is known.

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