religions

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How Can Humans Attain a Harmonious Cosmic Order? Max Scheler's Insights into Religious Experience in the Middle Period

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Abstract: This paper critically examines Scheler's mid-period religious theory, focusing on his pursuit of a harmonious cosmic order and religious experience by integrating Catholic theology and phenomenology. The argument has four key stages. First, I argue that the realization of this cosmic order, which enables communion with both the cosmos and God, relies on three elements: spiritual intuition, love, and faith in God's reality. Second, I contend that these elements, in turn, originate from God's self-revelation and divine love, which establish a bidirectional relationship between humanity and God. Third, I demonstrate that this mutuality is deepened through Scheler's dual-layered cosmic order, which employs analogy and phenomenological intuition to distinguish between the microcosm and the macrocosm. Finally, I identify two critical limitations in Scheler's framework: his oversimplification of the divine–human asymmetry through analogy and his insufficient treatment of the origins of evil. Therefore, while Scheler's synthesis offers valuable insights, it necessitates the further exploration of metaphysical and religious questions, particularly those concerning divine transcendence and the nature of evil.

Keywords: Max Scheler; spirituality; religious experience; love; self-revelation; cosmic order

Citation: Shi, Yuanping. 2024. How Can Humans Attain a Harmonious Cosmic Order? Max Scheler's Insights into Religious Experience in the Middle Period. *Religions* 15: 1248. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15101248

Academic Editor: Roy C. Amore

Received: 31 August 2024
Revised: 12 October 2024
Accepted: 13 October 2024
Published: 15 October 2024

1. Introduction

Max Scheler is a pivotal figure in the phenomenological "theological turn," with his intellectual development typically divided into early, middle, and late periods. The early period encompasses his years in Jena and Munich, beginning with his doctoral dissertation at the University of Jena in 1897 and concluding with his dismissal from his academic position in Munich in 1910. The middle period, spanning from approximately 1910 to 1921, sees Scheler primarily engaged in intellectual activities in Göttingen and Cologne.[1] His late period, continuing in Cologne from his public departure from the Church in 1922 until his death in 1928, represents the final phase of his thought.

Scheler's discourse on religious issues predominantly emerges in the post-World War I period, aligning with the middle phase of his thought. During this time, upheaval in European value systems, the erosion of faith in human nature, rising nihilism, and the perceived loss of cosmic harmony characterize the intellectual climate. Scheler addresses the crisis of religious belief and the existential challenges that humanity faced at the war's end. He wrote that war "inflicts unimaginable suffering, death, and tears" (GW 5, S. 103), imposing on humanity a profound sense of solitude and absurdity. He observed, "For the first time, humanity perceives itself as isolated in the universe and recognizes that the deity it fashioned for itself was an idol—the basest of idols since time began—inferior to graven images of wood, marble and gold" (Scheler 1954b, S. 105). To address the disarray of modern souls and the erosion of faith, Scheler sought to establish a harmonious cosmic order centered on divine order.[2] Through this, he sought to reaffirm the legitimacy of faith both in the human heart and in divine reality.[3]

Scheler's early explorations of religious thought drew significant influence from Rudolf Eucken. As early as 1903, he completed two articles, *Concept of Religion—A review of Rudolf Eucken's "The Truthfulness of Religion"* and *Culture and Religion*, which centered on Eucken's ideas and reflected Scheler's initial perspective on religion. His examination of religious thought deepened following the outbreak of World War I. In 1916, he published the second part of *Formalism in Ethics and Material Ethics of Values*, where he articulated his views on the sacred and its manifestation. That same year, Scheler authored two papers on the theme of love, *The Order of Love* and *Love and Knowledge*. After the war, Scheler continued his exploration of the phenomenology of religion, publishing *Absolute Sphere and the Real-Positing (Realsetzung) of the Idea of God* in 1919 and *On the Eternal in Man* in 1921. These works primarily present his discussions on religious experience and the quest for cosmic unity during his early and middle periods. Although his early- and middle-period thought on religious experience remains an unfinished study, it holds significant importance in the evolution of Scheler's thought. These works represent the continuation of the extensive discussion on ethics found in *Formalism in Ethics and Material Ethics of Values* and serve as focused expositions leading up to Scheler's later shift in religious perspective.

What, then, were Scheler's objectives in exploring the phenomenology of religion during this period? Scheler aimed to reconstruct and develop natural theology through phenomenology, drawing upon the resources of Augustinian thought. This endeavor, however, faced inherent tensions. As Hanna Hafkesbrink notes, Scheler recognized the profound antagonism between Catholicism and modern philosophy, which rendered it impossible to ground Catholic theology in a fundamentally heterogeneous modern philosophical system (Hafkesbrink 1942, p. 293). These dual sources in Scheler's thought precluded a compromise or an unbalanced amalgamation of Catholicism and modern philosophy. How, then, did Scheler specifically integrate these two intellectual resources to construct a new view of religion?

2. Spiritual Intuition: Direct Experience and Knowledge of the Cosmos

In this regard, during his early to mid-career phase, Scheler amalgamated the phenomenological method of intuition with the theological tradition of Augustine, primarily investigating the intentional relationship between religious acts and their objects. Love emerged as the paramount and quintessential religious act, characterized by a non-cognitive intentionality. Only through the establishment of an order of love is it conceivable to attain a state of harmonious fusion with the cosmos. Conversely, resentment signifies a state of disarray and confusion within the soul.

In Scheler's discourse on religious experience, the concept of spirit occupies a pivotal position. His understanding of spirit underwent distinct theoretical development across his early, middle, and late periods, each reflecting different phases of his thought.[4] Initially, Scheler's emphasis on spirit, deeply influenced by his mentor, Rudolf Eucken[5], had little connection to phenomenology. In his 1899 habilitation thesis, *The Transcendental and Psychological Method*, written under Eucken's supervision, Scheler described the doctrine that he sought to establish as a "theory of spirit." In his 1903 publication, *R. Eucken's Concept of Religion*, Scheler synthesized Eucken's entire religious philosophy into the notion of a "supernatural spiritual life" (Scheler 1971, S. 345). From a holistic perspective, Scheler asserted that this "spiritual life process" signified a cosmic force (Scheler 1971, S. 341).

This perspective, which associates "spirit" with "force," continued into Scheler's middle period. In his 1921 work *On the Eternal in Man*, Scheler defined rational spirit as "the epitome of acts, functions, and forces" (Scheler 1954b, S. 203). This essentially "supernatural" sacred spiritual life not only reveals itself to us through the positive "revelatory" significance of specific historical figures and institutions, but also operates as the comprehensive unity within all logical, ethical, and esthetic value functions of the human spirit (Scheler 1971, S. 340). Moreover, through his interpretation of Eucken, Scheler advocated for a "universal religion." He based this on the belief that "a spiritual world, which does not fully merge with the conscious inner life of individuals but instead acts

within it as a normative force for all cultural activity, constitutes the essence of the cosmos" (Scheler 1971, S. 340).

In Scheler's middle-period thought, "spirit" serves a crucial role as the nexus connecting the human, the cosmos, and God. He defines the essence of the human as "that movement, that spiritual act of self-transcendence" (Scheler 1954a, S. 293–94). However, he rejects the interpretation of this spiritual act as a mere quest for God, arguing that such a view would reduce human beings to static and definable entities. Scheler describes human essence as a living "X," engaged in a continuous search and entirely mutable within any possible psychophysical organization (Scheler 1954a, S. 296). Therefore, in Scheler's thought, the spiritual act of ongoing self-transcendence constitutes the very process of becoming this dynamic, seeking, living "X."

Furthermore, Scheler provides a detailed exploration of spirituality as a positive attribute of God. He asserts that the attribute of spirituality is "the most fundamental and primary positive (analogous) attribute of God" (Scheler 1954b, S. 178). Scheler emphasizes that God's acquisition of this positive spiritual attribute does not stem from an analytical development of the concept of "being from Itself" (*ens a se*) or from the notion of holiness. Rather, he argues that divine spirituality must emerge from the essence of the world itself: "God's positive natural attributes are derived from the essence of the world" (Scheler 1954b, S. 176–78).

In this context, God and the world do not connect through causality or the relationship between manifestation and the manifested. Instead, God reveals Himself exclusively within the world, thereby enabling His natural revelation and omnipotent work (Scheler 1954b, S. 172). Why, then, does the essence of the world or cosmos play a critical role in revealing God's spirituality?

Scheler contends that the term "spirit" describes something that, according to experience, humanity finds or can discover only within the world, namely in that part of the world that humanity itself embodies (Scheler 1954b, S. 179). The challenging issue demanding clarification is this: considering that God constitutes the foundation of the entire world, encompassing not only spirit but also other facts and causes beyond it, and that spirituality exists only in a small portion of the world, how can humanity attribute this characteristic, which pertains solely to a part of the world, to God?

This discussion necessitates the introduction of Scheler's two cosmic concepts and his method of analogy. Scheler distinguishes between the microcosm and the macrocosm. The microcosm refers to the "world" corresponding to each specific "personality," denoting the individual, concrete "personal cosmos," or the spirit of the person. In this context, Scheler ascribes a specific, individual spiritual essence to human existence. Conversely, the macrocosm corresponds to an infinite and perfect spiritual personality, as embodied in the concept of the infinite God (Scheler 1954a, S. 395). These two cosmic realms are interconnected: the microcosm, while maintaining the overall integrity of the world, constitutes parts of the macrocosm, which encompasses the microcosm. Scheler addresses the issue of God's positive attributes by drawing an analogy between these two cosmic concepts and corresponding forms of spiritual personality.

Specifically, Scheler identifies two conditions: first, that humans intuit and experience both themselves and the entire world as a realm imbued with spirit; second, that meaningful acts and their correlates are discerned within humans, which Scheler designates as "spirit." Only by meeting these conditions can one avoid reducing the intuitive object merely to a part of the world and permit the analogical ascription of spirituality to God (Scheler 1954b, S. 179). The concept of "analogy" is pivotal in this discussion. Scheler does not assert that humans can directly ascertain through religious acts that "God is spirit." Rather, religious acts can only capture the archetype of general spirit within human spirit and grasp the fundamental relationship between spirit and the general world within the human–spirit–world relationship. This process alone allows for the transfer of the archetypal concept (*Urbild*) to a divine "being from Itself"(*ens a se*) (Scheler 1954b, S. 183). Scheler presents two key insights: first, the intuition of the archetype of universal

spirit from within the human spirit; second, the intuition of the relationship between universal spirit and the universal world through the human spirit's connection to the world. The integration of these insights enables the intuitive archetype of spirit in humans to be perceived as "divine."

The following analogical relationship summarizes the connection:

Human Spirit : Microcosm = Universal Spirit : Macrocosm.

Scheler identifies a fundamental connection between the world and spirit, asserting that "the structure of this world and the structure of this spirit constitute an essential connection across all their respective parts" (Scheler 1986, S. 396). In his view, this essential connection has an ontological (*ontisch*) implication.[6] Thus, one can specify that the human spirit is fundamentally connected to the microcosm, while the universal spirit is correspondingly linked to the macrocosm. The human spirit, through its intuitive capacity, experiences the microcosm as imbued with spirit. Since the microcosm constitutes a part of the macrocosm, the human spirit intuitively apprehends a segment of the macrocosm. Furthermore, given that the universal spirit is invariably associated with the macrocosm, one can infer the existence of the universal spirit from the macrocosm, identifying this universal spirit as the divine spirit of God. Consequently, God is ascribed positive attributes of spirituality.

The crucial element of the aforementioned inference lies in the human spirit's capacity for intuitive apprehension. Scholars generally agree that the object of this intuition is the concept of God as the Absolute Domain, with Geyser serving as a notable representative. Geyser, a contemporary Catholic scholar of Scheler, published *Max Scheler's Phenomenology of Religion* in 1924, three years after Scheler's *On the Eternal in Man*. In this work, Geyser acknowledges a rational metaphysical understanding of God through analogy but critically denies any intuitive insight into God's existence, marking this as a key distinction between his thought and Scheler's religious philosophy (Geyser 1924, pp. 46–55). Contemporary scholar Ni Liangkang echoes this perspective, identifying the absolute apprehended by essential intuition as a significant point of divergence between Scheler and Husserl. He wrote, "The opposition between Scheler and Husserl is evident: the absolute that Scheler aims to grasp through essential intuition—the concept of God—is precisely the transcendent element that Husserl seeks to exclude through transcendental reduction in the first volume of *Ideas for a Pure Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy*."

However, as previously inferred, spiritual intuition directly pertains not to the concept of God as the Absolute but to the microcosm associated with the human spirit. The inference of the divine spirit ultimately arises from the fact that the microcosm is a component of the macrocosm, which in turn relates to the concept of God. Scheler further elaborates on this analogy through the concept of "the light of God" (*In lumine Dei*), suggesting that we always perceive the existence and essence of the world within a certain divine "light." The world is viewed as a "mirror" through which we recognize God: it is not by the light of God that we comprehend the world, but rather through the mirror of the world that we come to understand God (Scheler 1954b, S. 176)[7]. Furthermore, it is crucial to note that this analogy does not involve anthropomorphizing God by projecting human spiritual traits onto the divine. Scheler fundamentally rejects anthropomorphism, arguing that it fails to capture God's fundamental transcendence beyond finite categories and the essential difference between divine positive attributes and their human counterparts (Scheler 1954b, S. 175). The analogical method indicates a similarity in essence between God as spirit and finite spirit, yet they remain fundamentally different, as similarity can only exist between entities of different natures (Scheler 1954b, S. 174). Przywara encapsulates this essential difference as the "essential distance" between the Creator and the created, indicating that knowledge of God is not direct but involves a theological "indirectness" (*Mittelbarkeit*) (Przywara 1923, p. 109).

So, what specific state must a person attain to experience the fundamental religious intuition of "God as Spirit"? Scheler asserts, "Only when a person lives in the spirit, rather than in the belly (as the apostle said), can they recognize God as spirit in religious acts"

(Scheler 1954b, S. 180). This spiritual perspective is frequently overlooked: "A spiritual perspective views the already existing positive revelations and gifts of grace in the world, yet many fail to perceive them" (Scheler 1954b, S. 115). Specifically, to "live in the spirit" manifests in three aspects.

First, a person must center their spiritual actions around their core, mastering instinctual impulses and guiding their sensory functions (Scheler 1954b, S. 179)[8]. In other words, within this hierarchical framework of human nature, subordinate levels must comply with superior ones. This compliance stems from their need to acknowledge their own limitations with a rigorous positive insight. Only by freely serving the higher levels can they fully actualize their potential and sustain complete freedom within their domain (Scheler 1954b, S. 115–16).

Second, a person living in the spirit acquires a form of religious intuition that is fundamentally spiritual intuition. Schutz clarifies that Scheler's notion of spirit extends beyond "rationality," understood as the capacity for conceptual thought, to include the power of intuitive essence (Schutz 1970, p. 136). Scheler accords substantial importance to the concept of spiritual intuition. In his 1914 work *Phenomenology and Epistemology*, he asserts that phenomenology represents a spiritual intuition attitude. He differentiates it from being merely a scientific term or a philosophical synonym, characterizing it instead as an attitude through which one achieves intuitive (*er-schauen*) or experiential (*er-leben*) access to an object (Scheler 1986, S. 380). Scheler underscores the significance of this attitude in disclosing a specific domain of "facts." He further delineates the distinction between method and attitude. The former refers to goal-oriented modes of thinking about facts, such as induction and deduction, while the latter denotes an intuitive approach to facts that precedes all logical determinations (Scheler 1986, S. 380)[9]. When an individual possesses this attitude of spiritual intuition, they inevitably perceive the relationship between the world and spiritual activity in a direct manner (Scheler 1954b, S. 180).

Third, from the standpoint of subjective activity, Scheler emphasizes that the object of phenomenological inquiry is the unity of "theoretical" activity, namely the complete spiritual experience that occurring within the intentional act, characterized by a specific "consciousness of something." This spiritual experience pertains to a vivid, coherent, and direct engagement with the world—an engagement with the immediate reality. In other words, the structure of the world does not constitute a mere "configuration" formed by the spirit, nor simply the result of experiential laws derived from our experience of the world or from the general operations of the spirit. Instead, the world appears in experience as a "bearer of values" and as "resistance" (*Widerstand*), just as it is given as an "object." Thus, it becomes evident that spiritual intuition provides a direct experience of the world, presenting the world as the intentional object of the spirit within experience. In this sense, the spirit itself possesses intentionality. As Ni Liangkang's research indicates, Scheler's concept of spirit parallels Husserl's notion of intentionality, representing what remains after phenomenological reduction (Ni 2014, p. 312). Despite the intentional characteristic of Scheler's spirit, significant differences exist between Scheler's and Husserl's concepts of intentionality. Although Scheler's consciousness functions as a "spiritual consciousness of something," wherein the spirit acts as the capacity to constitute objects, these objects also include "values." Consequently, the spirit assumes the role of constituting and creating values. From the standpoint of religious activity, this value-creating process represents the spirit's continual orientation toward the divine: "The spirit itself bears a direction toward the eternal and the divine" (Scheler 1954b, S. 199).

It is evident that, in Scheler's early thought, the concept of spirit was not yet associated with "intuition" and was unified with "life," lacking the distinct separation between "spirit" and "life" that characterizes his later philosophy. During this early period, "spiritual life" and "life" collectively formed a cosmic force, contrasting fundamentally with the later perspective in which "spirit" is characterized as "powerless." In the middle period, "spirit" acquires a dual significance, encompassing both phenomenological and theological dimensions. This conception of spirit not only bridges issues related to phenomenol-

ogy and epistemology but also holds a central place in religious and theological thought. During this period, Scheler's notion of spirit parallels Husserl's concept of intentionality, with the intrinsic connection between "spirit" and "world" reflecting the a priori relationship between intentional acts (*Noesis*) and their correlates (*Noema*) in Husserl's philosophy. Furthermore, the relationship between "spirit" and "life instinct" undergoes a clear bifurcation during this period. The "spirit" ascends to a higher tier of power, dominating the lower instincts of life and possessing the capacity to create values. This raises the question: what motivates the spirit's creation of the highest values? This question closely intersects with Scheler's analysis of love.

3. The Order of Love: The Primordial Force of Achieving Cosmic Harmony and Transforming Destiny

Scheler places significant emphasis on the concept of love. While "spiritual intuition" carries a pronounced phenomenological focus during his middle period, Scheler's examination of the relationship between spirit and love, along with the "order of love," aligns with the intellectual tradition of Augustinian theology.[10] Scheler's emphasis on the primordial status of love represents a revival of Augustinianism. He regards Augustine as the eminent thinker who establishes love as the foundational principle: "The Indian axiom stands in stark contrast to Christianity, whose greatest thinker, Augustine, explicitly makes love the most original motivating force of the divine and human spirit" (Scheler 1963, S. 79). Additionally, Scheler interprets Augustine's "primacy of the will" as the "primacy of love" (Scheler 1963, S. 94).

In Scheler's philosophy, the significance of love emerges primarily in five key aspects.

First, love holds a foundational primacy, which manifests in two principal ways. On one hand, love not only directs the growth of entities but also acts as the most fundamental driving force behind their development. Scheler asserts that "love has always been a dynamic becoming, growing, and swelling of things in the direction of the archetypal image that is set in them by God" (Scheler 1986, S. 355). On the other hand, this primacy also pertains to a primordial act. Specifically, through love, "a being—while remaining a finite being—transcends itself to engage with another being as an *ens intentionale*, in such a way that both do not become real parts of each other" (Scheler 1986, S. 356). Furthermore, love functions as the prerequisite for all other activities of the subject: "love is always the awakener of knowledge and will—indeed, the mother of spirit and reason itself" (Scheler 1986, S. 356). As discussed in the previous section, love evidently functions as the driving force of the spirit, propelling it toward the discovery and pursuit of higher values. Moreover, Scheler underscores the precedence of love over cognitive activities: "Love first impels cognition, and only through the mediation of this cognition does it further motivate striving and willing" (Scheler 1963, S. 94). In his 1917 essay "*The Essence of Philosophy and the Moral Conditions of Philosophical Cognition*," Scheler reaffirms this perspective, contending that moral acts constitute the foundation of philosophical cognition. The love of the entire spiritual person for absolute value and being forms the core and essence of the structure of moral acts, directing us toward absolute being. Consequently, this love transcends objects that exist merely in relation to us (Scheler 1954b, S. 89–90). Sylvain Camilleri thus concludes, "Scheler insists that love precedes any value and any knowledge; thus, both axiology and epistemology rest on a science of love that motivates not only religious consciousness but also consciousness-in-general (*Bewusstsein überhaupt*)" (Camilleri 2014, p. 547).

Second, love facilitates the fusion of the individual with the cosmos. Scheler posits that love allows a being to enter a state of union with the world and the universe: "The being leaves itself, its state, and its existing conscious contents, thereby entering into a potential experiential contact with the world in accordance with the possibility" (Scheler 1986, S. 356). In Scheler's philosophical system, this experience of fusion with the world pertains not to the visible surrounding world but to the existence of the "world itself," which transcends the perceptible world and falls within the domain of philosophical cognition. Scheler highlights the significance of a "special effusion" in this context: "Philo-

sophical cognition is entirely directed toward a different realm of existence, one that lies wholly beyond or apart from the visible surrounding world. Therefore, a special effusion is indispensable for accessing the existence of the world itself." Specifically, our cognitive spirit, constrained by the limitations of bodily–sensory and instinctual systems, perceives the objects of the surrounding world as relative existences. The means to overcome this constraint resides in moral actions centered on love. Through love, the cognitive spirit can engage with the existence of the world itself, encompassing both being-in-itself and being-for-itself (Scheler 1954b, S. 89). Moreover, the fullness of love determines the depth of this intertwining with the cosmos—the more abundant the love, the deeper the integration with the universe. As Scheler observes, "The fullness, gradation, differentiation, and strength of his love determine the extent, functional specification, and potency of the spirit, as well as the depth of its connection with the universe" (Scheler 1986, S. 356).

Third, love facilitates both the comprehension of the individual and the transformation of destiny. Scheler contends that an individual's order of love encompasses two primary dimensions: the temporal dimension of destiny and the spatial dimension of surrounding structure. Whoever understands a person's order of love (*ordo amoris*) understands the person. This understanding functions for the moral subject as the crystallization formula does for a crystal. It reveals the person's essence as clearly as one can perceive another's, uncovering the fundamental contours of the heart that persist beneath all empirical diversity and complexity (Scheler 1986, S. 348). Thus, comprehending the order of love that a person adheres to amounts to understanding the person himself or herself.

Given this, how can an individual, constrained by destiny and surrounding structure, transcend these limitations? According to Scheler, the sole means to overcome such existential constraints is through reliance on an essence beyond both destiny and surrounding structure: God (Scheler 1986, S. 353). To obtain divine assistance and transform one's destiny, an individual must cultivate a pure form of self-love. This pure self-love differs fundamentally from mere self-interest; while self-interest involves perceiving everything, including oneself, from a self-centered perspective, pure self-love directs one's inner vision toward a transcendent spiritual center. In this state, one perceives oneself through the eyes of God, which primarily involves viewing oneself objectively and entirely as part of the cosmic whole. One may continue to love oneself, but only to the extent that one perceives oneself under an all-seeing gaze, within that specific degree and scope. All other aspects of oneself are regarded with abhorrence (Scheler 1986, S. 353–54). Therefore, when an individual attains this pure self-love, they establish a connection with God, who exists beyond destiny, thereby transcending personal limitations and altering their fate.

Conversely, when our love fails to reach God, we fall into a state of "disordered love," becoming ensnared by the dictates of fate and thereby incapable of changing our destiny. This disordered love originates from the influence of passions and impulsive desires: "When we "hit the mark," we love rightly and in an orderly manner; but when the positions are reversed and the graded hierarchy is disrupted by passions and impulses, our love becomes incorrect and disordered" (Scheler 1986, S. 367). A quintessential example of disordered love is "resentment." As Philip Blosser observes, "Scheler's essay on 'resentment' can be viewed as a case study in the 'disorder of the heart'" (Blosser et al. 2008, p. 92).

Fourth, Scheler asserts that love functions as an activity that creates value. True love emerges when it involves a movement toward what is already "real" in the beloved but not yet fully expressed in its content and quality. This movement aims at higher values that transcend those currently present. In this regard, love for an empirically given person inherently presupposes an "ideal" value image, which is simultaneously recognized as their "true" and "actual" being—more precisely, their value-being—not yet realized in feeling. This "value image" is indeed "implied" in the values given empirically in feeling, and only insofar as it is implied in them does no "imposition," "empathy," etc., occur, and thus no deception. However, it is nevertheless not fully "contained" within them. This creative process is not an arbitrary act of creation but involves the discovery and acknowledgment of higher potential values: "Love arises only when, on the basis of values already

recognized as 'real,' there emerges a movement, an intention, toward a potential value that is 'higher' than those already given and presented" (Scheler 1913, S. 53–54). Sylvain Camilleri describes this value-creating activity as a "spiritual movement." He argues that this movement enables values to attain a phenomenal state, which is then apprehended as a process of perception and emotion (Camilleri 2014, p. 547).

Fifth, Scheler also associates love with the concept of reality, asserting that things possess reality only through the participation of love: "Love participates in all things; without its will, nothing real can be real. All things, in some way (spiritually), partake in one another and are in solidarity with each other through love" (Scheler 1986, S. 356).

In Scheler's early thought, what characteristics does "love" possess? Scheler initially clarifies that "love, as the highest value of act" (Scheler 1954b, S. 333), eludes precise definition: "As the ultimate essence of acts, love and hate can only be made visible (*erschaubar*), not defined" (Scheler 1913, S. 52).

How do the characteristics of love become apparent or visible? Scheler's framework differentiates between human love and divine love. From the perspective of the spirit discussed earlier, human love aligns with the human spirit, while divine love corresponds to the divine spirit. Scholars such as Philip Blosser have summarized these two forms of love as the subjective and objective dimensions of the order of love (Blosser et al. 2008, p. 32). The subjective dimension pertains to love as an intrinsic aspect of the human essence, indicating that the essence of being human lies in being a "loving being" (*ens amans*) prior to being a thinking or willing being (Scheler 1986, S. 356). The objective dimension refers to divine love, which embodies the essence of the cosmic order. Accordingly, Renato Cristin characterizes this form of love as a universal force transcending the human sphere, where love encompasses the divine (Cristin 1998, S. 189). Roger Funk encapsulates this view: "It is both the source of all that proceeds from a person in the form of his loves and hates and at the same time a microcosm of the *a priori* order of values" (Funk 1974, p. 51).

Scheler's theory of the *ordo amoris* is two-sided: it is both the source of all that proceeds from a person in the form of his loves and hates and, at the same time, a microcosm of the *a priori* order of values.

For personal love, Scheler describes it as a spiritual love that ascends from the lower to the higher realms, signifying a sense of reverential distance toward God.[11] Personal love exhibits three distinct traits.

First, love exhibits an inherent dissatisfaction and boundless expansiveness, representing an intentional movement toward higher values. Scheler asserts that every form of individual love is an incomplete expression of love for God (Scheler 1986, S. 356). This reflects the spirit's eternal orientation toward the divine: "The spirit itself bears an orientation toward eternity and the divine" (Scheler 1954b, S. 199).[12] Such love remains in a state of perpetual motion toward God or the divine, characterized by an inherent and unending incompleteness that Scheler describes as "eternal dissatisfaction." He asserts, "For any impulse of love, satisfaction gained by fulfilling it in a suitable object can never be ultimate. In the act of love completing itself in an object of love, it can stretch from value to value and from height to higher height" (Scheler 1986, S. 358). Scheler characterizes this progression toward higher values as an intentional movement, where "the appearance of a higher value is realized, starting from a given value A" (Scheler 1913, S. 53). In this dynamic ascent, love attains its significance as a creative force, emerging precisely through its movement toward ever-higher values (Scheler 1913, S. 54).[13]

Second, love does not operate as a "stimulus-response" behavior but rather as an act of spontaneity. Scheler distinguishes between sympathy and love, noting that sympathy generally manifests as a "reactive" behavior. In contrast, he emphasizes that "all spontaneous behaviors imbued with positive value should take precedence over mere 'reactive' behaviors. While all sympathy is inherently reactive, love is not" (Scheler 1913, S. 3).

Third, love exhibits an inherent order. Scheler's notion of the "order of love" draws upon Pascal's exploration of love, particularly Pascal's assertion that "the heart has its reasons which reason does not know" (*Le coeur a ses raisons, que la raison ne connaît point*).

Scheler elaborates, "The heart itself represents a structured counterpart to the cosmos of all possible lovable things; in this sense, it functions as a microcosm of the world of values" (Scheler 1986, S. 361). Through the heart, we grasp the essence of humanity, our place in the universe, the universe's meaning, and our relationship with the divine. Scheler interprets Pascal's perspective as indicating that while the intellect formulates reasons based on logic, the heart offers its own form of reasoning and understanding, rooted in moral values rather than in strict logic.

In the framework of divine love, love manifests as a transcendent, top-down sacred affection. Scheler, however, advocates for the reorientation of love from the divine to the human, shifting the focus from saints to sinners. This transition from the higher to the lower reflects a foundational approach where love becomes the underpinning of other values and existence. According to Scheler, all true self-love is grounded in divine love (Scheler 1954a, S. 489), a view that parallels Augustine's perspective on love, which aligns fundamentally with Platonic thought. Augustine regards love as a guiding principle and method, rather than ascribing to it any metaphysical or ontological significance (Scheler 1963, S. 96). How, then, does Scheler's perspective on love differ from the Platonic and Augustinian conceptions?[14] Scheler interprets Greek thought as depicting love as a progression from the lower to the higher, from the material to the ideal, and from the human to the divine, moving from the bad to the better. In contrast, Scheler's own framework advocates for the reorientation of love that flows from the higher to the lower, shifting from the divine to the human and from saints to sinners. This reorientation aligns with a novel foundational framework in which love underpins other values and existence. To gain a deeper understanding of the metaphysical significance of this conception of love, we must refer to Scheler's 1919 work, "*The Possibility of the Realization of the Idea of God and the Idea of Self-communication*," which explores the notion of self-communication or self-revelation.

4. Faith and the Self-Revelation of God: The Ultimate Foundation for the Achievement of Cosmic Harmony

As previously discussed, the transformation of an individual's fate and the achievement of pure self-love necessitate not only personal effort but also divine assistance. Consequently, individual love finds its foundation in God's divine love. This divine love is conceptualized as a process of self-revelation, which will be examined in the context of grace in this section. Scheler describes this self-revelation through various terms, such as "self-communication" (*Selbstmitteilung*) or "self-disclosure" (*Selbszerschließung*). Thus, the primacy of love, as discussed earlier, also reflects the precedence of grace and the self-revelation of the divine personhood. Scheler maintains that, without the implicit presupposition of God's self-revelation, neither proofs of divine reality nor rational postulates for its acceptance can substantiate the assumption of this reality (Scheler 1986, S. 199).

God's self-revelation differs fundamentally from natural revelation. The notion of natural revelation, previously examined in the context of "spirit," illustrates how humanity may ascribe spirituality to God through analogies such as the "divine light" and the dual cosmos. Viewing the world through the lens of "divine light" constitutes God's natural revelation. Scheler captures this concept by defining natural revelation as the perception of God as the personal correlate of the totality of all entities and their interrelations within the world. Specifically, it entails recognizing God as the personal correlate of the entirety of essential states and connections intuitable in the world and its formations. This "totality" thereby constitutes the natural revelation of God (Scheler 1986, S. 190).

Scheler argues that natural revelation, illuminated by the "divine light," enables the possibility of human spirit and phenomenological intuition. He asserts that the comprehension and phenomenological intuition of "man," as the "highest valued" secular and moral being, rely fundamentally on the presupposition of the idea of God and the illumination provided by the "divine light" (Scheler 1954a, S. 293). In *Love and Knowledge*, Scheler builds upon Augustine's theory to articulate the concept of natural revelation, particularly the self-revelation of objects and the world. He interprets Augustine's idea of love as a

form of "inquiry," wherein the world "responds" by disclosing itself, thereby achieving its complete existence (*Dasein*) and value through this act of disclosure. In this framework, a natural understanding of the world attains the status of "revelation," where natural revelation simultaneously represents a "revelation" (*Offenbarung*) of God (Scheler 1963, S. 97).

Despite humanity's ability to intuit the essential states of the world through natural revelation, this capacity does not extend to recognizing the personhood of God. Scheler emphasizes that we cannot infer any revealing essence from the totality of these essential states and connections of the world, nor can we arrive at the reality of God through direct knowledge. Epistemological or axiological "proofs" of God's reality fundamentally fail (Scheler 1986, S. 190). For the world as essence is a positive value, while the world's reality is a good (better than its non-reality); this notion presupposes the essence and reality of an all-good God (Scheler 1986, S. 194). In sum, the reality of God establishes the foundation for the reality of the world, rather than the other way around (Scheler 1986, S. 188–189). In other words, natural revelation derives its foundation from and presupposes the reality of God.

How can one apprehend the personhood and reality of God? This inquiry necessitates distinguishing between God's natural revelation and self-revelation. As previously addressed, God's natural revelation concerns the correlation between God and the totality of the world. This is fundamentally different from God's self-revelation, which concerns the reality of a specific personhood of God independent of the world's correlation with God (Scheler 1986, S. 190). Furthermore, this distinction manifests in the difference between spontaneous love and responsive love. Scheler describes self-communication as an expression of God's freedom and spontaneity, aligning God's reality with spontaneous love (Scheler 1986, S. 200). In contrast, God's natural revelation relates to responsive love, which aims to discern essential states (Scheler 1986, S. 191). Among these forms of love, spontaneous love possesses superior value over responsive love. Only through such spontaneous action and affection can the potential reality of the divine emerge (Scheler 1986, S. 187).

Thus, Scheler draws three definitive conclusions. First, natural revelation fails as a "proof" of God's reality. He contends that natural revelation offers no "proof" of God's reality. By its nature, natural revelation represents a pious, retrospective interpretation of our rational and spiritual understanding, an interpretation that is "already founded on the presupposition of God's reality" (Scheler 1986, S. 191).

Second, natural revelation functions to prepare for the recognition of God's "personhood." Scheler concludes that natural revelation primarily apprehends God's spirituality, which paves the way for the comprehension of God's "personhood." Religious contemplation of the true bearer of the "divine" essence begins only when God is ascribed spiritual and supra-formal attributes, such as spirit, reason, will, love, benevolence, omniscience, omnibenevolence, and creator. In this context, the world, as a natural revelation of God's potential essence, transforms into His work and creation (Scheler 1954b, S. 172).

Third, only God's self-revelation enables knowledge of God's reality. Scheler contends that if God embodies any form of personhood, the nature of this personhood inherently limits our capacity to apprehend God through spontaneous cognitive acts. Rather, any possible knowledge of God must originate from God Himself, arising from His condescension to our sovereignty and freedom, and from His act of revealing and communicating Himself to us as a person. This act of self-disclosure is referred to as "revelation." Consequently, only through revelation—or grace and illumination—can one attain knowledge of a personal God (Scheler 1954b, S. 331). Scheler firmly asserts that only this self-revelation of personhood allows for "giving oneself to be recognized as real" (*Sich-als-real-zuerkennen-Geben*) (Scheler 1986, S. 185). In essence, without this self-revelation of personhood, understanding the reality of personhood, specifically referring to God, remains unattainable. Scheler concludes that "God's essence cannot be apprehended through spontaneous acts but only through self-communication (religion)" (Scheler 1954b, S. 200). This self-revelation of the real constitutes the prerequisite for any other form of revelation. It is crucial to note that the more precise expression for God's self-revelation is the "self-

revelation" of God's own self: "one must not equate 'self-revelation' in the sense that it is God himself who reveals, with 'self-revelation' in the sense that God reveals (primarily) 'himself'" (Scheler 1986, S. 186). This distinction lies between the self-revelation of God as the subject of revelation and the self-revelation where God is the object of revelation. In the former, God reveals Himself as the subject within a finite personhood; this self-revelation is the "fundamental form of knowing the general reality of God." In contrast, when God becomes the object of revelation, this presupposes the former and represents the highest and most fitting form of revelation (Scheler 1986, S. 186).

How does God's self-revelation achieve its reality? Scheler addresses this by invoking the theory of intentionality in religious acts, drawing on Husserl's theory of intentionality, which highlights the a priori correlation between intentional acts (*Noesis*) and their correlates (*Noema*)—encapsulating the idea that "consciousness is always consciousness of something." Scheler identifies a parallel structure. He posits that each potential act inherently "contains" an object or value (or resistance), establishing an essential relationship between the act and the object. Furthermore, the existence of objects and values (and resistances) possesses independence for all human cognitive acts, being an inherent fact within the essence of any cognitive act. Consequently, Scheler posits that this "consciousness of something" presupposes a belief in the something. He notes, "Even the table before me is given as 'real' and phenomenological manifest only within an act of belief (whether it is actually real or merely imagined, as in genuine hallucination)" (Scheler 1986, S. 243). Scheler concludes, "The consciousness of the reality of 'something,' with respect to its mode of consciousness, is invariably a form of belief consciousness" (Scheler 1986, S. 243). This belief consciousness applies equally to the recognition of God's reality and the reality of an ordinary object such as a table. In other words, the affirmation of the reality of any entity, including God, can only occur through acts of belief. Religious acts, therefore, are fundamentally defined by the divine personhood that reveals and draws them, with their essence rooted in faith in this divine personhood. Through both the act of "believing in" and the act of "believing of" "something," general reality and existence come into presence (Scheler 1986, S. 242). Nevertheless, it is crucial to recognize that the reality of God revealed through acts of belief cannot be "proved" (*Beweis*) but can only be "indicated" (*Aufweis*) and "confirmed" (*Nachweis*). Thus, how can one elicit belief in the divine personhood? Given that religious acts transcend the world and point toward existence within the "absolute domain," the initial presentation of this domain within an individual's finite consciousness may be occupied by nothingness or finite entities, thereby leading to phenomena of "deception" within the religious sphere (Frings 1997, p. 128). Human belief can only be awakened and engage with God, receiving divine revelation, by overcoming this "self-deception" (*Selbsttäuschung*).

5. Critical Conclusions on Scheler's Mid-Period Religious Thought

In the preceding analysis, this paper elucidates Scheler's response to the question of how human beings can achieve a harmonious cosmic order. The study concludes that Scheler, employing the method of analogy and a phenomenological intuitive approach, constructs a dual-layered cosmological model to address this fundamental concern.

In Scheler's mid-period religious thought, the question of how humans achieve a harmonious cosmic order is, in a certain sense, equivalent to the question of how humans can return to God. This equivalence arises from Scheler's assertion that the cosmic order is fundamentally rooted in the divine order. As the preceding discussion has shown, Scheler distinguishes between the human spirit and the divine spirit, between the subjective and objective dimensions of the order of love, and correspondingly between the microcosm and the macrocosm. These three pairs fall into two overarching categories: the microcosm, which aligns with the human spirit and the subjective dimension of the order of love, and the macrocosm, which corresponds to the divine spirit and the objective dimension of the order of love.

Regarding the relationship between spirit, love, humanity, the cosmos, and God, spiritual intuition enables a direct experience of the cosmos and the divine, with love as the essential impetus for this spiritual engagement. Furthermore, human love for God ultimately originates in God's love or self-revelation. While Barthian dialectical theology advocates for a unidirectional path from special revelation to humanity, Scheler's phenomenology of faiths posits a reciprocal relationship between God and humanity, characterized by a bidirectional path—from God's self-revelation to humanity and from humanity to God. Human love and spirit are perpetually in pursuit of God, a pursuit grounded in God's self-revelation. The following diagram illustrates the complexities of this dynamic interaction (see Figure 1).

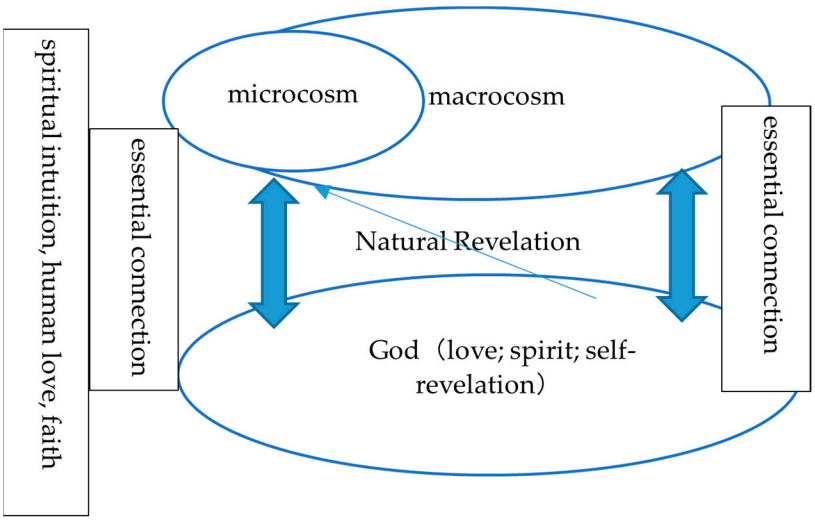

Figure 1. Scheler's Dual-layered Cosmic Order.

This diagram illustrates an analogical relationship: the fundamental connection between the human spirit and the microcosm mirrors that between the divine spirit and the macrocosm. Through spiritual intuition, humans can directly experience the microcosm, which, as a component of the macrocosm, facilitates an indirect experience of the macrocosm. Given that the divine spirit intrinsically connects to the macrocosm, spiritual intuition reveals a cosmos already illuminated by the light of God. In other words, the intuitive experience of the cosmos inherently presupposes the existence of God, representing God's natural revelation, which is grounded in God's self-revelation.

This paper argues that Scheler's dual-layered cosmological structure effectively integrates phenomenological resources with theological thought. The concept of spiritual intuition draws from the phenomenological theory of intuition, while the essential connection between humanity and the cosmos parallels the intentional structures found in phenomenology. Simultaneously, Scheler's use of analogy, emphasis on love, and focus on God's self-revelation resonate with Catholic theological tradition. Instead of allowing one intellectual resource to dominate, Scheler integrates these elements into a cohesive whole, presenting a unified perspective from a higher vantage point.[15]

However, Scheler's approach, while compelling, is not without its limitations. One significant critique concerns the extent to which his model of spiritual intuition, particularly its reliance on analogy, risks oversimplifying the complexity of the divine–human relationship. By structuring this relationship through analogy, Scheler posits a degree of symmetry between the human and divine that may obscure the radical alterity of God. This raises the question of whether Scheler's bidirectional pathway between humanity and God sufficiently accounts for the fundamental asymmetry inherent in divine transcendence. Moreover, Scheler's emphasis on love as the unifying force between the human and divine arguably underestimates the tension between divine grace and human finitude—a tension that warrants deeper scrutiny of the limitations of human spiritual capacity.

A further critical issue in Scheler's mid-period religious thought is his treatment of the origin of evil. While his analysis of the disorder or inversion of the order of love offers a sharp diagnosis of the spiritual and social ills of modernity, it lacks a thorough exploration of the metaphysical roots of this disorder. Scheler's own reflections on the origins of evil—where he questions the sources of human suffering and moral decay—remain incomplete. This omission raises significant concerns about the adequacy of his cosmological model to address the existential and ethical crises resulting from such disorder.

In conclusion, Scheler's integration of phenomenology and theology offers profound insights into the interconnectedness of humanity, the cosmos, and God, but it leaves critical questions unresolved. His reliance on analogy, while illuminating, risks oversimplifying the complex, asymmetrical relationship between the human and divine, particularly in regard to divine transcendence. Moreover, his treatment of the disorder of love lacks a comprehensive account of the origins of evil. Therefore, his thought, though foundational, invites continued philosophical inquiry into the deeper metaphysical dimensions of love, evil, and the divine–human relationship.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: Data are contained within the article.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflicts of interest.

Notes

1 Scholarly opinions diverge on the precise endpoint of Scheler's middle period. One prevalent periodization suggests 1911–1919, categorizing *On the Eternal in Man* (published in 1921) as a work of his later phase.

2 In Scheler's thought, "cosmos" is synonymous with "world."

3 De Warren offers profound insights in his book on the relationship between World War I and Scheler's thought. He contends that, in the aftermath of the war, Scheler confronted the desolation of humanity and argued that only by returning to God could humanity reclaim its place within the cosmos. See (De Warren 2023, p. 40).

4 In his later writings, Scheler focuses on the dialectic of "spirit-drive," portraying the spirit as inherently impotent. He increasingly acknowledges the historicity of spirit, recognizing that spiritual activities and value systems differ across historical epochs. This historical perspective leads him to examine the specific manifestations and functions of spirit within various cultures and eras.

5 R. Eucken's philosophy underscores the primacy of spiritual values, asserting that the spiritual personality defines human essence and enables individual elevation. The essence of spirit, according to Eucken, lies in its liberation from the constraints of the life-world and impulses, thereby achieving true freedom (Macswiney 1915, pp. 3–24).

6 According to Scheler's logic, the essential connection between the two implies the a priori existence of both spirit and world. Consequently, he concludes that the ontology of spirit and world precedes all epistemology (Scheler 1986, S. 396). Kobla Nyaku summarizes Scheler's approach, noting that this unique method integrates essential knowledge with spiritual intuition—metaphysics and religion, respectively—rendering Scheler's position particularly relevant to contemporary interpretations of religious experience (Nyaku 2022, p. 1).

7 Within the scope of this analysis, Eugene Kelly explicitly highlights that, in Scheler's thought, the vision of God is not direct: "We no longer see God directly; the sun is, as it were, 'at our back' as for Faust" (Kelly 2010, p. 162).

8 In the second edition of *The Nature of Sympathy*, published in 1923, Scheler's thought undergoes a fundamental shift. The spirit no longer holds an absolute leadership position; instead, Scheler argues that spirit should relinquish its leadership and allow the instincts of life to take precedence. He states, "To achieve unity, a person must simultaneously 'heroically' transcend his body and everything important to him, while also 'forgetting' his spiritual personality or disregarding it—this means surrendering his spiritual dignity and letting his instinctual 'life' take charge. One could also say: he must become 'less than' a being endowed with reason and dignity, yet 'greater than' an animal that merely lives and 'exists' in its bodily state. Of course, the closer this animal is to this liminal type, the farther it is from being an animal and the more it resembles a plant" (Scheler 1973, S. 46). Thus, Philip Blosser offers the following summary of the tendencies in Scheler's early and later thought: the early period emphasizes the spiritual act of willing, while the later period prioritizes the possibilities of drive (Blosser et al. 2008, p. 96).

9 In his evaluation of Scheler's thought, Schutz also emphasizes this passage, though primarily by reiterating Scheler's argument: "To Scheler, phenomenology is neither a new science nor a substitute for philosophy, but the name for a particular attitude of spiritual vision by which a realm of "facts" of a special kind, otherwise hidden, is revealed. It is an attitude, and not a method,

if we restrict the meaning of the latter term to a technique of knowing employed to attain certain ends in processes of thinking or experimentation" (Schutz 1970, p. 146).

[10] Hammer refers to Scheler's phenomenological method as an "intuition of the essence of love." While this specific term does not appear in Scheler's own writings, to the best of my knowledge, "spiritual intuition" can be considered equivalent to "intuition of the essence of love" due to the close connection between spirit and love (Hammer 2012, p. 19).

[11] In Scheler's thought, an individual's love for God is inseparable from reverence for God. As Betz points out, Scheler's concept of love inherently involves otherness (Betz 2019, p. 97).

[12] Anthony J. Steinbock encapsulates a religiously toned experience with the term "verticality," and this vertically oriented love precisely captures the distinctive characteristics of love in Scheler's thought (Steinbock 2009, pp. 6–19).

[13] During this period, Scheler's conception of humanity diverges significantly from his later philosophical anthropology. At this stage, he understands humanity as fundamentally oriented toward love, particularly love directed toward God. Consequently, the essence of human existence lies in its quest for God. The "human" is defined by an intentional posture of transcendence, embodying the essence of prayer and the search for the divine. As individuals transcend their static self-existence in pursuit of God, they fully realize their humanity. Scheler's conception of humanity in his early to mid-period is fundamentally that of a "religious human" (*homines religiosi*) (Scheler 1954b, S. 339).

[14] Regarding the relationship between Scheler and Augustine on the order of love, some scholars argue that Scheler's concept directly originates from Augustine, and Scheler himself traces this idea back to him. However, there are differing views; for instance, Heidegger contends that Scheler misunderstood Augustine's concept of order, seeing Scheler's interpretation as a misreading of Augustine. See (Heidegger 2010, p. 115).

[15] However, Scheler himself was not fully satisfied with his understanding of religious experience during this period. His discussions on the disorder or subversion of the order of love were largely rooted in a diagnosis of the ills of the era and society. In this sense, he assumed the role of a "physician of the age," proposing a series of therapeutic solutions. Yet, the question of the very origins of this disorder or subversion (or, more broadly, the problem of the origin of evil) continued to perplex Scheler. He lamentingly asked, "Where lies the root of evil, the source of danger that assails the people and causes their suffering so that humanity might arm itself against this element to punish their demonic, rebellious dimensions?" (Scheler 1954b, S. 104). This ultimately led to a fundamental shift in his metaphysical stance.

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