Abstract. Max Scheler’s essay on virtue, first published under a pseudonym in 1913, begins with some reflection upon the decline in his era of a concern for virtue. Its central theme is a phenomenological exhibition of the Christian experience of humility, reverence, and related concepts, together with an exploration of their historical and social embodiments in Western culture. The core of humility is a spiritual readiness to serve, related to love, that produces in its possessor a liberation from the ego. The core of reverence is its sense of what surpasses our vision. It has the power to reveal to us the deeper value and being in all things. The paper contains elements of a polemic directed against scientific naturalism.

Because of the lofty and sentimental apostrophes directed at it by the citizen poets, philosophers, and preachers of the eighteenth century, the word “virtue” has become regarded with such disfavor that we can hardly help but smile when we hear or read it. For our epoch, in which work and success are paramount, it is sufficient to speak of “proficiency.” Moreover, the virtues of our times are so decidedly ugly, so divorced from people, and so much attached to the rules of that independent living monster we call “business” or “enterprise,” that people of good taste take care of their virtue in silence, and are zealous to keep at least such matters from becoming public. When false solemnity curries favor with a thing, it does not leave it long unsullied.

Why should virtue be an exception in this matter? And yet this old, scolding, toothless maiden was in other times, in the flowering of the Middle Ages

1[Conventions. Footnotes without brackets are by the author. Footnotes in parentheses are those of Maria Scheler, the editor of volume three of Scheler’s Gesammelte Werke, in which this essay appears, and are marked “Ed.” Footnotes in square brackets are by the translator, and are marked “Trans.” The numbers in square brackets in the body of the essay refer to the pages of the German edition.—Trans.]

and among the Hellenes and the Romans before the Empire, for example, an extremely graceful, attractive, and charming thing. While people today associate the word with painfully hard work in the conduct of something or other not intended for other people, one spoke with pleasure in those times of the “radiance” of virtue, of the “ornament” it offered a person, and compared it with the most precious jewels. The Christian symbol of the halo let virtue shine forth spontaneously from the depths of the person and made visible the idea that the goodness and beauty of virtue does not lie in acting for the sake of others, but rests primarily in the high and noble nature of the being and essence of the soul and is of value to others almost incidentally as an example: not simply as an example “one gives,” but as an example that others can “take” to themselves.

Virtue has become so intolerable to us most of all because we no longer understand it as an enduring, living, joyful consciousness of one’s capacity and power to desire and to act for what is right and good in itself and, simultaneously, to desire and to act for one’s own individual self, as a consciousness of power that flows out from one’s very being. We understand it rather as a mere dark unfathomable “disposition” and as a natural ability to act according to some prescribed rules. And it has become so unattractive because not only the achievement of virtue, but virtue itself is considered by us to be so difficult. Yet in fact only the lack of virtue, or vice, makes goodness a difficult and bloody affair, while its possession gives to every good action the free and spontaneous appearance of a graceful bird. It has become such because we imagine that we can make it habitual only by continually doing our duty, while in fact it is the extreme opposite of all habit, and only the measure of virtue’s inward nobility can “oblige” us at all and determine by itself the relative rank and quality and the abundance of our many possible duties. Today one speaks of virtue in such a way as if it had nothing to do with the virtuous man, as though it existed only for the general population, who use this concept to make a quick abbreviated estimate of how another person to whom they attribute or deny virtue is likely to behave toward them. When virtue had not yet become ugly, it was contrasted with proficiencies and skills—which were always proficiencies and skills “in something,” that is, skill in some previously defined arena of achievement—as a quality of the person himself, not there “for” some determinate activities and tasks, not even for the usefulness of other persons, but rather as a free ornament of its bearer, something like a feather in his cap; it could never be measured in terms of all those acts of will and actions that burst forth from

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3 The Scholastics therefore ascribed virtue to what they called habitus (= qualitas difficile mobilis secundum quam res bene vel male se habet in ordine ad suam naturam: Thomas), and made a sharp distinction between “habitus” and “dispositio.”
it with inner necessity, in which it overflowed. If one assumes that the “gods demand sweat” in the doing of what is required, so that with every step this powerful light inside oneself grew brighter ever more easily and quickly, it was still not thought to be virtue that must be “willed” and “acquired;” virtue itself was counted rather as the “surplus,” something not striven after, but as the gift of grace, for the solemn reception of which all the efforts and strivings of will were only the necessary preparation. Virtue conceals itself even more rapidly and deftly from those who run after it breathlessly than its more common sister, happiness.

The Greeks found virtue to be so attractive that they tied it closely to the innocent word beauty by such words as eu ζήν, εὐγενής, καλοκάγαθια, etc. They did not wish to lower virtue, as did the modern bourgeois philosophers, for example, Kant, to the level of the mere effect of the duty-bound will or of a disposition to such acts of will—as if such things could ever ennoble persons with the gift of virtue. In contrast, virtue was not yet an empty word for them; rather it was first the nobility of virtue, dwelling within, that “obliged.” This is what determines the extent and the weight of responsibility for one’s possible actions; yet no one bore responsibility for its possession or non-possession. Its inward weight impelled one to an ever widening extension of responsibility, so the person who possessed it to its highest degree, that of holiness, quietly felt himself responsible for everything that happened in the entire world. And to try as much as possible to throw off responsibility, to limit it to one’s own actions and among those to the smallest possible circle of actions that one “cannot show to be commanded” was counted as a certain lack of virtue. This does not mean, however, that it was always thought to be an inborn natural aptitude, as petty reactionaries, with whom Socrates took issue, have in all epochs described it. These “capacities” exist only for specific proficiencies, and run in families, clans and peoples; virtue, in contrast, is a living consciousness of the power to do what is good, quite personal and individual. This felt power was itself thought to be better than that “to which” one had power, and as dynamically greater that the sum of the efforts to do any specific good thing. With the growth of virtue the effort becomes less, and with that it loses the ugliness lying in all strenuous effort. Goodness becomes beautiful by becoming easy. The so-called moral law and duty are in contrast only impersonal surrogates for what virtues one lacks. Duties are transferable; virtues never are. For that reason we have to imagine the goodness of God to be non-lawful and dependent upon His absolutely infallible discretion that judges each case on its own and without reference to rules.

4(For moral law, duty, virtue, proficiency, see Der Formalismus in der Ethik, table of contents of the fourth edition [Bern, 1954].—Ed.)
It is time for us to stop being the mere opponents of those stale citizens of the eighteenth century, and in that way help make virtue ridiculous. Those who prosecute become the minons of what they prosecute. In the end it is a matter internal to the bourgeoisie that one part of it makes virtue into an old woman in order to praise her to the skies, and the other part demonstrates better taste. What do the bourgeoisie and its peculiar opinions, with which it occasionally interrupted the course of world history, matter to us? Let us ourselves search for a world-historical horizon for virtue!

I.

Humility. Of the new attitudes of the heart that the appearance of Christ produced and dressed in the splendor of divine glory, humility is the one—if it is correctly considered and understood—that, in contrast with both the ancient and the modern bourgeois attitude toward virtue, embodies the deepest paradox and the strongest antithesis. Humility is the most tender, the most concealed, and the most beautiful of Christian virtues.

Humility (humilitas) is a steady inner throbbing of spiritual readiness to serve in the core of our existence, of a readiness to serve that is directed toward all things, the good and the evil, the beautiful and the ugly, the living and the dead. It is the inner imitation in the soul of the single great stirring of the Christian idea of divinity, in which the divine being freely gives up its greatness and majesty, and comes to humankind to become the free and joyful servant of everyone and of every creature. As we co-execute this movement and let go entirely of our ego, of all its possible value and its respectability and dignity, to which [18] the proud man clings tightly, we truly “lose” ourselves, “abandon” ourselves—without fear of what may then happen to us but dimly confident that the co-execution of that divine stirring as “divine” may also serve our salvation—then we are “humble.” The genuine “letting go” of our ego and its value, daring to adventure upon the fearful emptiness that gapes beyond what is related to the ego consciously and semiconsciously—that is just what matters! Dare to be amazed and thankful before the fact that thou art not nothing, that anything at all is—and not rather Nothingness! Dare to dispense with all thy presumed inward “rights,” thy “worthiness,” thy “merits,” all the respect of men—especially, however, with your “self respect”—with any and all claim to be “worthy” of any kind of good fortune and to look instead upon it as a gift: Then only art thou humble!

“Humility” stands in the most extreme opposition to the rational moral attitude of the Roman stoics, to the method of acting so to preserve and not to lose the “sovereignty” and the “dignity” of one’s self. For that reason it is also in opposition to the moralists of the eighteenth century—notably to Kant’s
“autonomy of duty”—who reclaimed, not without a fine sense of its congeniality and kinship with themselves, the attitude toward life of late-Roman bourgeois philosophy. “More than happiness itself, my dear Lucilius, we desire the worthiness of possessing it,” Addison has one of his “Stoics” say. This saying also reflects a fundamental idea of Kant’s ethics. But just this saying is, according to Christian feelings, not half-true, not false—but demonic. Accept all forms of happiness, even the least, the smallest joy that affects your senses, just as you accept the deepest blessedness that flows over you and leads you and all things into the light of God: accept them thankfully, and never imagine that you “deserve” even the smallest part of them: that is the commandment of humility. Is there a purer love than to grant to another the blessedness of loving, yes, even to grant the appearance of a certain kindness to things that by chance stand by us just at the right time—even just where the world asserts a so-called “just claim” upon the service rendered simply out of love by someone, or even by things as a matter of chance—as the chair that is ready when we want to sit, or the sunshine when we have no umbrella? And is it not worthy of thanks that the world contains a righteous man when he chances to treat us “justly”?

It is not true that the Christian ethos damns all pride [Stolz], all striving for respect, merit, and dignity. Being proud of one’s wealth and possessions is natural. Being proud of one’s beauty is natural, of the beauty, health and well-being of one’s wife and one’s children. Being proud of one’s name and one’s origins is natural. [19] Just these kinds of pride, which Stoicism damns, are sensible and reasonable. These goods are sufficiently worldly to bear the pride we feel for them. There is only one form of pride that is demonic: that is pride in one’s own moral value as the highest value, the pride in one’s goodness, or the vice of the fallen angel—whom the Pharisees will always imitate. The pride of the first kind, which the Stoics ascetically condemn as mere futile vanity, is itself still built upon a kind of love for the very things “of” which one is proud. One looks pridefully upon those expansive estates, upon these obliging manifestations of favor of those who greet us in passing, upon the uniform that one wears, as upon things that still have a certain worth of their own, even apart from our taking pride in them. The pride of the second kind, however, which the Stoics presumptuously played off against the pride of the first kind—it alone constitutes, according to Christian sensibility, “superbia” and the source of the Devil. Just as pride makes us incurably poorer by darkening the world and ourselves, as pride has the proud man raise himself always above all things and values until he looks down in his complete “sovereignty” over everything—except upon the complete emptiness and nothingness he has now achieved; just as it successively unites us from all the goods and values that the first kind of “pride” had still left intact, and “of which” precisely we were still proud as a “limiting” condition of absolute pride, just then it has us feel pride for our naked and emptied self—this development
of pride describes exactly the passage that leads into what Christians correctly called "Hell," the real hell, that is, the lack of love. And pride approaches this absence of love and encircles the self ever more tightly, harnessing ever more strongly one's consciousness of values to the mere cipher of the self. By the sheer striving for "self-respect" and "independence," the inward image that the proud man has of himself, whose content he values only because he is the one who owns and values it, becomes an ever more opaque medium that, at length and in the end, keeps him from self-knowledge and self-understanding. "Independence" becomes the knife that cuts through all the living threads that tie the man who is prideful in this way to God, the universe, and man. "This I have done,' my memory tells me. 'I cannot have done this,' says my pride, and refuses to budge. Finally—memory gives in" (Nietzsche).普 Pride makes one ever more lonely, ever more like what Leibniz chides the atom for: being a déserteur du monde. Is this pride in one's goodness and in oneself not like a man who slowly strangles himself in a wilderness?

The prideful man is himself too full of pride to place any value upon the picture others have of him, or upon his appearance and role in society. He is too proud to be vain. But vanity is simply ridiculous, not demonic. It is ridiculous because the vain man becomes unconsciously subject to the judgment of those whom he seeks to outdo by parading his own superior qualities. He becomes the victim of a secret sympathy for humankind by consciously removing himself from it and trying to draw its attention to himself. What deserves a hearty laugh is that he does not notice that he is serving what he seeks to master; he becomes common just where he pretends to be uncommon. The vain man is merely superficial, and his shame is not great enough to control his tendency to enjoy his image in the mirror. But the sympathy contained in vanity—however misguided it may be—gives it the charm of a kind of love gone astray. That charm is lacking in pride, which has depth, like all evil things.

If shame anticipates the tendency to put oneself on display while secretly adopting alien standards of value that the prideful man scorns a priori—the kind shame that aims at concealing one's visible advantages—then we call it "modesty." This virtue is just as shallow as the vices that it disavows, for it is merely a contest between vanity and shame, in which shame is victorious. The social sphere contains it entirely, and just for that reason one should not confuse it with humility, which aims at—the world.

5(See Nietzsche's Jenseits von Gut und Böse, IV. Hauptst.: Sprüche und Zwischenspiele, No. 68.—Ed).

The proud man: he is that man who, by incessantly “looking down” convinces himself that he is standing upon a tower. He overcompensates for every lowering of his person by looking in the direction of something even lower—so that he has to think himself rising higher, while in fact he is sinking. He does not notice that the depths into which he gazes ever again are, by that very gazing, drawing him slowly toward themselves, so that he always gazes at them more, in order to imagine himself lofty. Thus the angel slowly “falls,” drawn in the direction of his gaze. This looking-down is justified just as long as it is a question of values and goods like offices and honors that can be owned, and as the attitude limits itself to social comparisons. For then we have only haughtiness, which does not exclude essential humility. Thus the typical lords and knights of the early Middle Ages, also the great popes, were extremely haughty and humble at one and the same time. This mixture is the special charm of ways virtue expressed itself in that epoch. Only one thing excludes humility: essential pride, pride directed at the substance of one’s own value! This alone is the demonic, and leads to hell. Humility, however, is the virtue that leads one straightaway into heaven by letting the humble man sink ever deeper down, before himself, and, passing through his selfhood, before all things. For humility is nothing but the resolute gaze upon the lines of our Self, which seem to direct it toward the ideal state of our individual essence, whose points of intersection lie in the invisible—in God. It is a constant vision of oneself “in God” and “through the eye” of God, a genuine “journey under the eye of the lord.” The great ladies of Provence who led the courtly minstrel competitions included in their rules the sentence: “The image of the beloved is always present.” One does not need to “reflect” upon it, not even to “remind” oneself of it. To the contrary: one has to look away from it artificially in order to let what is always present and active in it become a bit obscured. But just so is this “image” of his own individuality also constantly present to the truly humble man, an image which, he senses at every moment, the stirring of God’s love for him traces out and at once sends toward him. How could he know himself otherwise, in every empirical moment of his life, to be slight and small, if not before the brilliance and the greatness of this image? While he sees himself in the sphere of his consciousness fall deeper and deeper and be humbled ever more profoundly as he penetrates into this divine image, in fact that lovely image snatches him upward to God, and in the very substance of his nature he rises softly into heaven.

Humility is the method by which love, with the power of the sunlight, breaks up by itself the rigid ice that painful pride had bound about the ever empty self. There is nothing sweeter and lovelier than when love magically brings humility into proud hearts and makes the heart open itself and flow forth! Even the proudest man and the proudest woman still become a bit humble and ready to serve all things, when they love. Just like the most gossamer-like buds of Christian
love, humility is the Christian virtue *par excellence*, and in its purity it is only the tender silhouette that the stirring of holy, God-centered love casts upon the soul. And this love of the world and of God and of all things is truly from and of God, and “the love in God” (the Scholastics’ “amare Deum et mundum in Deo”), this lovely self-humbling, breaks up the clouds about our spirit and allows the full light of every possible value to stream in upon us. The prideful man, whose eyes gaze, as though spellbound, upon his own worth, lives necessarily in night and darkness. The realm of his awareness of values becomes darker minute-by-minute, for every value he notices is to him the theft and robbery of his personal value. Thus he becomes a devil and a naysayer! Confined in the prison of his pride, the walls that seal from him the world’s brightness grow ever higher. Do you see his self-absorbed, jealous eye when he wrinkles his brow? In contrast, humility *opens* the spiritual eye for all the world’s values. Humility, while starting from the assumption that *nothing* is owed us and *everything* is a gift and a miracle, more than all else causes *everything* to gain in value! Humility makes us feel how wonderful space is, in which bodies can extend themselves as they please without fear of falling apart. How even more wonderful and worthy of thanks are space, time, light and air, the ocean and the flowers, even—as humility joyfully discovers ever again—feet and hands [22] and eyes among all those things whose value we are usually capable of grasping only when they are uncommon and others do not have them! Be humble, and straightaway you will be rich and powerful! For humility is the virtue of the rich, as pride is that of the poor. *All* pride is needy, is “beggar’s pride!” If in fact everywhere in the world there is truly a bit of grace for the emotions and a bit of wonder for the understanding, how should the proud man, who “wants nothing as a gift” and grasps nothing in its purity, feel and understand the meaning of the world? How should he, who wishes to take in only what has paid tribute to his so-called twelve categories of the understanding—better: his twelve generic eccentricities and his general *idées fixes*—know something essential about the world? How could a person know something about the world who imagines that “his understanding legislates laws to nature,” and that there is no other “judge” over him than he himself?

Humility is that profound art of the soul in which it relaxes its tensions even beyond the act of merely letting itself be and letting its life flow along. There are two pathways for cultivating the soul and overcoming its natural pettiness and apathy. The first is that of the *intensification* of the spirit and the will, the concentration of powers, the self-conscious alienation from things and from oneself. All “rationalism” and all morality of “self-liberation,” of “self-judgment,” or of “self-realization” go in this direction. The other pathway is that of the *relaxation* of the spirit and will, of the expansion and progressive sundering of the threads that are still able, despite their flaccid and idle state, to chain automatically the world, God, humankind and all other creatures to one’s own
organism and to one's own self—this pathway leads toward a marriage with things and with God. He who takes the first pathway fears the second. He is suspicious of the course and ways of the world, he is suspicious of the course and ways of his own soul, and he trusts himself and his will alone. His ideal of perfection is "to take charge of" himself and the world. He who takes the second pathway does not fear the first one any less. He, who begins with total trust in the being and the source from which all things emerge, thinks it insane to wish to "organize" a world perceived as questionable. Feeling himself deeply to be a part of the world and full of patriotism for this world, he considers it absurd that the part thinks to make the whole something better than the whole itself, which in the end envelops and contains him also. But that does not mean that he sees and feels any less what one calls the "meanness," the "weakness," the "evil," and the "meaninglessness" of the world. To the contrary: Only the lover truly suffers from the badness and the weakness of his beloved. The first man rather rejoices in these evils, for they give him the sense of how much better he is, and because they "give him something to do." The humble man does not seek the sources of this evil in the being, in the essence, in the very roots of the world: He seeks them in the mistaken orientations of his interests, in the hastiness of his drives, and in the muscle tone of his flesh and spirit, that is, in his "attentiveness," which makes the world a poorer place. First, he seeks them in his own overly-great intensity in life, and then in that of others. He is concerned to overcome this intensity, along with the natural "pride," the natural centering of the world and of values upon his Self, his organization, even upon the organization of every genus and species and every specific community, in order by this means to thrust forward into the world itself and to its roots—in which he secretly knows perfection to lie. He is concerned to eliminate the inhibitions that conceal from him the full and entire being and light of things. By boldly releasing himself—by severing, severing completely, the ropes of the anchor that the world has cast into his Self—he does not fear, as the other man does, to become the victim of the stormy waves, but he desires, with the new life gleaned from the roots of things, to be the inward play of the ocean's power and to live unharmed within it.

This pathway of the complete loss of oneself by winning oneself anew in God is, in the moral realm, the way of humility, and in the intellectual realm, the way of pure "intuition." To relax one's efforts in this way is extremely risky, yet it is the activity of boldness as it becomes the very being of the soul. William James recently described very well this radical renunciation of one's own power and one's own worth, the pure "commending oneself to God" and "letting oneself be taken under the wing of the Hen Christ" (Luther). In the section of his book, The Varieties of Religious Experience, 1902, entitled "Conversion," he takes note of the two religious types of conversion, that "based in the will" and that
based in “self-abandonment.” He shows by many examples how much greater is the significance of the second type than the first. Even in our most elementary intentions, such as trying to think of a name, it is not by straining our efforts but rather by relaxing them that we achieve the desired end. One says to oneself: Give up this effort completely and think of something else; — and in just this way what we were looking for appears all by itself. All such cases belong, in general, to the same type, one where all struggles, all having of “good intentions,” with which, as the old saying puts it so profoundly, “the way to Hell is paved,” are forgotten and everything is entrusted to a slowly growing inner power that playfully gives forth of itself what we sought so zealously.7 Frank Bullen, whose autobiographical At Sea with Christ is cited by James, leapt astride the beam to pull in and tie the outer jib during a powerful storm. Suddenly the beam gave way. “The sail slipped through my fingers, and I fell backwards, hanging head downwards over the seething tumult of shining foam under the ship’s bows, suspended by one foot. But I felt only high exultation in my certainty of eternal life . . . I could have hung there no longer than five seconds, but in that time I lived a whole age of delight . . . How I furled the sail I don’t know.”8 This inner miracle of an ever-renewed rebirth and the obtaining of strength to “fasten the sails” from an endless reservoir of energy, by means of a complete renunciation of one’s “own powers” and of even the least sense of one’s own worthiness, that is the goal at which all forms of humility unconsciously aim.

Yet in his last work, A Pluralistic Universe, 1909, James writes: “Luther was the first moralist9 who broke with any effectiveness through the crust of all this naturalistic self-sufficiency, thinking (and possibly he was right) that Saint Paul had done it already. Religious experience of the Lutheran type brings all our naturalistic standards to bankruptcy. You are strong only by being weak, it shows. You cannot live on pride or self-sufficingness. There is a light in which all the naturally founded and currently accepted distinctions, excellences, and safeguards of our characters appear as utter childishness. Sincerely to give up one’s conceit or hope of being good in one’s own right is the only door to the universe’s deeper reaches. . . . The phenomenon is that of new ranges of life succeeding on our most despairing moments. There are resources in us that naturalism with its literal and legal virtues never recks of, possibilities that take our breath away, of another kind of happiness and power, based on giving up our own will and letting something higher work for us, and these seem to show a world wider

7The meaning of the term “grace” has no doubt its foundation in such experiences. This meaning is still correct even if the causal tracing of the phenomenon to an “act of God” is incorrect.

8[Taken from William James, The Varieties of Religious Experience (New York: Random House, 1929), 283.—Trans.].

9This assertion does not cohere with the historical facts.
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than either physics or philistine ethics can imagine. Here is a world in which all is well, in spite of certain forms of death, indeed because of certain forms of death—death of hope, death of strength, death of responsibility, of fear and worry, competency and desert, death of everything that paganism, naturalism, and legalism pin their faith on and tie their trust to Reason; operating on our other experiences, even our psychological experiences, would never have inferred these specifically religious experiences in advance of their actual coming. She could not suspect their existence, for they are discontinuous with the 'natural' experiences they succeed upon and invert their values. But as they actually come and are given, creation widens to the view of their recipients. They suggest that our natural experience, our strictly moralistic and prudential experience, may be only a fragment of real human experience. They soften nature's outlines and open out the strangest possibilities and perspectives.”

The most silly and amusing misunderstanding of Christian humility among the modern bourgeoisie takes humility to be a kind of “servility” before God raised to a virtue, as the “virtue” of the poor, the weak, and the lowly. It is obvious that the attitude calling itself “pride of the citizen before the royal throne,” and the attitude of all parvenus, to think it their duty, before all else “not to dare let anything be a gift,” that is, the feeling, posited a priori, of complete not being, which expresses itself so stridently in the ear of everyone not deaf to morality just in the parvenu’s emphasis upon the value of “I earned it myself,” of being self-made, must lead to this deception. What could the “bourgeois,” who wants only to “become somebody,” who still secretly measures himself against his betters and his kings, even when he “proudly” bristles at them, possibly know of humbling oneself of one’s own accord, of the sweet urge to self-immolation of these who are something (the ἐσθελοί), and who do not think themselves lofty just because they obviously stand upon the heights? Humility: that is precisely the movement of self-humbling, hence the movement of coming down from above, of arriving from the heights, of God allowing Himself to come softly down to man; of the holy man descending to the sinner—this free, daring, fearless movement of a spirit whose own obvious fullness makes the very thought of squandering himself baffling to him; who cannot “give himself away” because he is only a giving that pours forth from himself. Does the servile man want to give and to serve? The servile man “wants” to rule, and only a lack of strength and wealth has him bow down before his master and serve him with his hands. As he grows used to his gestures of prostration, he becomes servile. Humility, in contrast, is before all else a virtue of the lordly-born, and consists in the

10 [Taken from the English edition of A Pluralistic Universe.—Trans.]
11 (On "selbsterworben" [achieved by oneself] and its evaluation in modern morals, see the next essay in Vom Umsturz der Werte, "Das Ressentiment im Aufbau der Moralen."—Ed.)
refusal to let what to them are obviously earthly values, of honor, of fame, of the flatteries of their servants, draw near to the center of their souls—and in always bowing their own inner head before the invisible realm in the midst of and during their rule over [26] the visible one. The humble man carries out whatever his rulership requires with a deep secret readiness to serve those over whom he rules. What is for him just an attitude is for the servile man the essential: the will to rule! And what is for him essential is for the servile man only an attitude. Readiness to serve!

II.

Reverence. The God whom Christians worship is deus absconditus. He is “concealed,” and it is just this concealment, this eternal transcending of the field of vision even of the most holy and pious men, this endless distance we sense by which God extends beyond the horizon of our worship and our prayers that is itself a phenomenon mysteriously thundering about the visage He turns toward us. Rationalists as well as mystics often forget this. Both are far too quick to think themselves intimate with God, the former by dissecting him with concepts, the latter with the feeling they have when God appears to swell their breast. Both lack reverence, that is, that attitude in which the concealment of God itself becomes perceivable. For reverence is not a feeling added to complete, perceived things, even less to the mere distance that feeling erects between us and things (their “filigree” as Nietzsche nicely put it). To the contrary, it is the attitude in which one perceives something else beyond what one lacking in reverence does not see and with respect to which he is blind: The mystery of things and the deep value of their existence.

Whenever we pass beyond the irreverent, that is, the typical scientific explanatory attitude, and attain the reverential attitude toward things, we see how something is added to things that they did not possess, how something in them becomes visible and palpable that they formerly lacked: just this “something” is their mystery, their deep value. Here are found the tender threads by which each thing extends into the realm of the invisible. To sever these threads, either by trying to fix the sphere into which they extend by clear concepts and to develop an ontology and theological dogmas around them, or by banishing humankind to the realm where things can be grasped only by the senses, is equally to stifle the spiritual life and to falsify the fullness of the real. The first pathway runs through the history of all metaphysics and theology; the second through all positivism and agnosticism. They are both equally without reverence! But reverence is the unique and necessary attitude of the heart in which these “threads into the invisible” achieve spiritual visibility. Where reverence is arbitrarily excluded or not present at all, the world [27] of values becomes two-dimensional and like a thing closed
upon itself. Values become emptied out, and simultaneously any enticement to go on living and to penetrate more deeply the realm of values, any enticement to develop our existence by penetrating more deeply into the world, is destroyed. We are able only to “live” truly by sensing that what is at any moment visible, sensible, and graspable in our environment is encircled by a sphere of shores that grow dark upon myriad levels, each enticing and calling us to discovery. The phenomena of “horizon” and of “perspective” are contained not only in the arena of the purely optical. They are encountered again in the realm of our beliefs, our concepts, our interests, our loves and our hates, indeed even of our purest ideas. “Horizon” and “perspective”—we know this also from very accurate psychological measurements—are not consequences of the geometrical-physical effects of light and of the anatomy and physiology of our optical apparatus, but are rather inclusive functional laws of our own and of any finite spirit. But “reverence” is what in the region of values maintains these elements of horizon and perspective in our spiritual nature and world. The world becomes immediately a stale textbook exercise, an object of calculation, when we disconnect the spiritual organ of reverence. It alone gives us the awareness of the depth and the fullness of the world and of ourselves, and it makes clear to us that the world and our nature bear within themselves an inexhaustible wealth of value, that each step we take can reveal to us what is eternally new and young, amazing and unseen. An artist like Gottfried Keller gives us—in a way almost unique to him—not only the impression of the limitlessness and inexhaustibility of the world, indeed of everything he describes, by making, with a grand embarras de richesse, things speak of themselves in ever new ways, and disclose ever new aspects of themselves, but also especially by making us sensible of all that things could yet say about themselves if they were questioned so open-heartedly as he would question them. And that is quite in agreement with the answer that the hero in “Verlorenen Lachen” gives to the question about his religion, an answer that contains the most lovely description of the attitude of reverence. He knows one thing, that with respect to the world he “is capable of uttering no insolent words.”

Not only God and the world, but, even more: our own self and that of our loved ones first appear in their deepest dimensions in the act of reverence. A man who claims to see through himself and understand himself completely does not demonstrate that he knows more about himself than does a reverent person, in whom buried treasure glistens, as from a brook, out of himself he demonstrates only that he does not care to tread the path needed to make visible his own depth of being. For this path is reverence before his own self. It alone gives to us [28] the mysterious awareness of a wealth and a fulfillment where

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12[Gottfried Keller (1819—1890), Swiss poet, essayist and writer, noted especially for his novel, Der grüne Heinrich.—Trans.]
the clear and fixed materials of our thought and feeling give us only emptiness and scarcity. Reverence gives us the sense of the treasures in our existence and of the powers that are ours and unalienable from us in this earthly term of life. It intimates to us an arena of action for our genuine powers, one that is larger and more sublime than our temporal existence. It prevents us from making final value-judgments, either positive or negative, about ourselves that only tie down and capture us, and it extends and erects new pathways and new signposts before us, upon which we can enter into ourselves, perhaps at first getting lost, but at last able to find ourselves.

The word “reverence” should not seduce us into thinking that it is a mixture of fear and shyly loving veneration. It is a simple elementary movement of our feeling, and only the word, not what it refers to, is compound. One may instead think of it as related to shame. In what it makes manifest in objects we perceive continually the soft call of things that “no eye has seen, nor ear has heard, what God is preparing for those who love him,” a word of the Gospels that suggests an all-too-exact familiarity with the organization of heaven, of a kind our theologians are accustomed to disclosing. At the heart of shame is a revelation of beauty in the gesture of its self-concealment. “Shame” is a beautiful concealment of the beautiful. Does not even an obviously ugly woman who feels shame make us unconsciously aware that she possesses secret beauties that we do not see at the moment? And does she not become “beautiful” just by means of that? Ugliness is simply “hidden away;” it is only beauty that is “covered up” by being modestly concealed. Reverence, however, is a kind of shame that becomes spiritual. In it we become immediately aware of the insufficiency of the categories of our understanding when standing before the world and before our soul, and at the same time, we become aware of how overly narrow and particular is the structure of our organization for the proper knowledge of the world. But as we become aware of this, we know just as immediately that we are participating in divine and spiritual being and life, which—if our participation were only more free of this contingent narrowness of its placement in us—would hasten along those delicate yet still visible threads leading into the invisible depths of things and deliver us to all its still-concealed treasures. Yet even shame appears also in the sudden awareness and urgency of the finite side of our nature, even in the course of executing spiritual

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13[Reverence, Ehrfurcht, is compounded of Ehr(e), “honor,” and Furcht, “fear.”—Trans.]

14See on this matter my book about the “meaning of shame,” which will soon be appearing. [The author is referring to his “Über Scham und Schamgefuhl,” a posthumous essay that appears in Gesammelte Werke, vol. 10. The essay has been translated as “Shame and Feelings of Modesty,” trans. Manfred Frings, in Max Scheler: Person and Self-Value. Three Essays, ed. Manfred Frings (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1987). Frings notes in his introduction that the German “Scham” does not have a negative connotation, and can be rendered in English as either “shame” or as “modesty.”—Trans.]
acts in which we think to realize eternal divine laws, laws which have nothing to
do with the finitude and the neediness of the point of departure of just these acts
upon which now we suddenly look back. Only when they were taken, by sin, from
the [29] blessed commingling with God, and from a love in which they were lost
in each other, is it said of Adam and Eve: “they saw that they were naked.” Thus
shame and reverence have one and the same root: both are an immediate aware­
ness of the places of rupture where a ray of the infinite spirit falls upon a narrow,
needy organizational form of life and lets shine forth to us only that which in
each case is the most “important” for our organizational form.

Therefore, it is not surprising that the scientific rationalism of the modern
bourgeoisie raises the same objection to both reverence and shame: that these
feelings have retarded “scientific progress.” However, the feeling of reverence,
which in antiquity and, in part, in the Middle Ages mankind had toward the
starry skies as a convocation of “visible gods,” a notion echoing in the theories
of such a relatively sober man as Aristotle, for example in his doctrine that
the “superlunar world” was made of a different, “finer” stuff than terrestrial
things, and possessed a different form of motion, seems to have hampered
only the mathematical-mechanical calculation of the skies. Analogously,
reverence and shame before the human corpse is supposed to have held up
for centuries its dissection, and, along with this, progress in the science of
anatomy that was dependent upon it. Vesalius was the first to have dared to
use the knife upon it. And was it not shame that caused the postponement
of timely diagnoses of diseases and psychic complications, which, had they
been recognized earlier, could have been cured and done away with? Was not
the progress of psychology especially slowed in its progress by it? Science, in
Nietzsche’s opinion, offends feminine modesty: he cites the case of the little
girl who was horrified when she learned that God was all-knowing and “saw
everything always.”

However indubitable the facts of history enumerated here—and thousands
of similar ones—may be, they show only that reverence and shame were seeking,
first slowly and gradually, a more appropriate object for themselves, and that a class
of things tends to become “free” for scientific inquiry when a deeply engaged
and spiritualized reverence toward things has already penetrated to a level of its
own existence that is closer to the invisible sources of the visible world. The level
that is more distant from those sources and more turned toward our senses then
becomes “cold,” and comes to be seen as amenable to scientific analysis. If one
studies more closely the diverse epochs of progress, for example in astronomy, one
will perceive at its source the continuous growth of a new and deeper reverence
for the invisible. One will find, for example, that a new and deeper reverence

15The circular form of motion, as opposed to the straight-line, “terrestrial” form of motion.
had developed in advance of the detachment of feelings of reverence for the visible night sky, [30] in which attitude the idea of the “heavens” had undergone a religious purification and spiritualization. Thus it was not too much but rather too little genuine reverence toward the divine and the world that had hampered the “progress of astronomy.” Analogously, it was too little shame and too little feeling of the invisible depths of the human person that led to the embalming of the human corpse, and arbitrarily protecting it from corruption, and later made its dismemberment appear at least to be impious. The inner laws of our spirit guarantee that we need no moralizing admonitions, be they for or against reverence. They bring it about that only those things can be “free” and “available” for scientific inquiry that the living, urgent thrust of the spirit into the universe, into the Self, into God, has already left itself behind as a dead residuum. Not the living traditions, but rather the dying ones can be dissolved and destroyed, for example, by the science of history; not living religious teachings, but only those which have lost the secret language of religious sanctification and power of edification, and have thus become silent for our souls, because reverence and prayer have already penetrated deeper in God than the now “defunct” writings do. “Science” does not have the power to kill. To the contrary, what it takes possession of must already be dead.

Precisely when science reaches its peak, its bearers have blended together as a unity their spiritual organ for the invisible, to which reverence also belongs, with the Logos striving within them. Isaac Newton thought himself to be “like a child playing with shells upon the ocean shore”16 as he developed the principle of gravity and celestial mechanics, and he saw in every line of his “absolute space” a line of vision of the all-penetrating “Eye of God” (sensorium Dei). It is a rigid law of all intellectual progress that the problematic character of the world grows with every new solution to specific problems. Every newly discovered “interconnection” points to new and still unknown ones. In modern physics the number of “constants” grows faster as other facts formerly assumed to be constants become variables in more general theories. Nature is always becoming less “simple” (H. Poincaré). Imagine that the process of inquiry was completed: would not then everything be a pure miracle? It is not the science of the inquirers, but rather that of the rationalistic schoolmasters, avid for system, that comes into conflict with the spirit of reverence. Whoever does not simply “present materials” and “do proofs” with his students, but rather “discovers” and “inquires,” must struggle every moment with the phenomenon that his intuitions overflow the limits of his understanding, and his feelings disclose facts and conditions that he cannot yet “conceptualize.”

16[Incorrectly quoted from Brewster’s Memoirs of Newton (1855).—Trans.]
What we call “science” owes its historical source to the gradual increase in contact between the wonder and the reverence typical of the metaphysical spirit, and the desire for useful rules for the control of matter: a contact represented by the slow merger of a class of freemen with a class of merchants. Only both together could produce the peculiar product “science.” Without the first factor, it would never have elevated itself above a collection of empirical rules for artisans; without the second, it would never have come upon the assumption of such a fertile mechanical principle, which restricts the interest of knowledge to the malleable and tractable aspects of the universe. Only in more recent times does it appear to recall its partial origin from “below” while forgetting its noble ancestors.

For it is time to remind science that without the attitude of reverence toward things even the living fascination with its own progress would at once be stifled, and it is time to admonish it, lest it fall all-too-soon into the spiritual state regarding the universe of those to whom Schopenhauer, not entirely unfairly, denied “verecundia,” and say with them: “The world? No great achievement!”

\[17\] For the formal proof of this statement, I refer the reader to my book on Phenomenology and Theory of Knowledge that will soon appear. (See the posthumously published essay, “Phänomenologie und Erkenntnistheorie,” in Gesammelte Werke, vol. 10.—Ed.) [An English translation is contained in Max Scheler: Selected Philosophical Essays, ed. David R. Lachterman (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1973).—Trans.]