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The Forms of Knowledge and the Humanities

Max Scheler, the Sociology of Knowledge and the Humanities in the 'Age of Equalization'

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The Forms of Knowledge and the Humanities. Max Scheler, the Sociology of Knowledge, and the Role of the Humanities in the 'Age of Equalization'

Discussions of the role and legitimacy of the humanities were highly prevalent during the Weimar Republic in Germany (1919-1933). It was an age of multidimensional crisis, but also an age of sustained growth of scientific institutions in Germany. The discussions were concerned with the shaping and institutionalization of old as well as new scientific disciplines, rather than with their very right to existence.

Max Scheler (1874-1928) was a prominent philosopher of the age, whose thinking was metaphysical and religiously inspired; but he is best known for his seminal contributions to the interdisciplinary fields of the sociology of knowledge and philosophical anthropology. Prominent in Scheler's teaching figures the idea of 'forms of knowledge'. Since the present symposium is concerned with the form(s) of knowledge in the humanities, I would like to spell out this idea of Scheler's, and the implications for the humanities (in Germany often called 'the historical sciences of mind') he attributed to it.

Based mainly on Scheler's lecture *Die Formen des Wissens und die Bildung* (1925), and his book on the sociology of knowledge, *Die Wissensformen und die Gesellschaft* (1926) I will investigate what he understood by 'forms of knowledge', which forms of knowledge there are, according to him, and how they relate to the humanities, and to the particular role of the humanities in a time he diagnosed as the 'Age of Equalization' (*Weltalter des Ausgleichs*).

I will then discuss the contemporary significance of Scheler's concept of 'forms of knowledge', his time diagnosis (how does it relate to contemporary diagnoses like 'globalisation', 'late modernity', etc.?) – and not least, the relevance of the idea of forms of knowledge to the humanities today (is it fruitful in order to identify and justify the role of the humanities?).