

PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION (1928)

This book was most significantly inspired by the profound tensions between natural science and philosophy I encountered as a zoology student in Heidelberg under Otto Bütschli, Curt Herbst, Wilhelm Windelband, Ernst Troeltsch, Hans Driesch, and Emil Lask. As someone who did not want to sacrifice the one to the other, these tensions impelled me to reflect on new possibilities of understanding nature from a philosophical perspective in a way that would be as able to withstand the severe criticism brought by the philosophy of the time as it would be receptive to impulses coming in particular from the new biology of Driesch and Jakob von Uexküll. I believe I took the first step in this direction with my *Die Einbeit der Sinne* (The Unity of the Senses).¹ It was while I was writing this book that I conceived of the plan for the current volume, which I originally intended to publish in the form of a short pamphlet, as a sort of addendum to the final chapter of *Die Einbeit der Sinne*. Once I began writing, however, it became clear that this plan was impossible. The work required a broader scope and had to have its own foundation and methodology. In 1924 I announced it in the foreword to *The Limits of Community* under the title "Plants, Animals, Man—Elements of a Cosmology of Living Form." External circumstances along with the great difficulty of having to work on terrain neglected by the recent philosophical tradition delayed completion of the manuscript until the fall of 1926.

The questions of philosophical biology and anthropology treated in this book emerged from the systematic continuation of my reflections on a philosophy of the senses. The theory of sensory modality as a specific form of relation between a lived body [*Leib*] and a psyche, or between materiality

and meaning-giving [*Sinngebung*], demanded—in particular as regards the so-called lower senses and the problem of the objectivity of sense qualities—a more fundamental formulation of the relationship between the lived body and its environment [*Umwelt*]. This in turn led to new insights into certain laws of the correlation between the form of the lived body and that of the environment [iv],² which evidently constitute the organizational laws of life. From there it was only one step to a theory of the levels of correlation between form of life and sphere of life that encompasses the plant, animal, and human types of life.—In addition to this development of questions deriving from the elementary theory of knowledge, my studies in social philosophy led me straight to the anthropological problem.

The preface is not the place to review the historical background of the new questions being asked. Wherever this becomes necessary, I do so in the work itself. Of course, this book would not have been possible without the recent revolutions in the fields of psychology, sociology, and biology, and, especially, philosophical methodology. It is too early, incidentally, to decide which forces have been most significant in the emergence of the new philosophical disciplines, whether it is psychoanalysis or *Lebensphilosophie*, cultural sociology or phenomenology, intellectual history [*Geistesgeschichte*] or the crises in medicine. Given this topicality of the new book, it is, in any case, important to keep in mind the originality of its conception. Nothing can harm the cause of philosophical biology and anthropology more than applying to them the standards of a synthesis derived from the most varied sciences in response to the concerns of our times.

The fact that the following investigations are grounded in the conviction that these disciplines are sciences with their own methodology and original intuitive foundations brings them into line with the views of that brilliant researcher who, as far as I can see, to this day works alone in this field: it is Max Scheler's indisputable achievement to have made a wealth of discoveries in his work on emotion, structural laws of the person, and the structural connections between person and world that belong to the thematic stock of philosophical biology and anthropology. Furthermore, his activities in recent years show that he is on the point of establishing a foundation for philosophical anthropology that takes into account earlier bio-philosophical analyses known in part to the older Munich and Göttingen phenomenology circle that, for instance, influenced Hedwig Conrad-Martius's *Metaphysische*

Gespräche [v]. While I hope for substantial agreement between the subject matter of my work and Scheler's research, I also do not want to brush over the crucial differences in our approaches to the problems being treated. Notwithstanding the metaphysical tendencies of his philosophy, Scheler, in all foundational questions, is a phenomenologist. His most important works, including his most recent publications, show his focus to be a primarily phenomenological one. Since I published my work on methodology in 1918, however, I have resisted using phenomenology as a foundation-securing research approach. I will not elaborate on this point here. Phenomenological work, in my view, requires for philosophy a certain methodological guidance that should have neither an empirical nor a metaphysical source.

Of the great thinkers of the recent past, none knew this more deeply than Wilhelm Dilthey. Dilthey's philosophy and historiography constitute, both in terms of methodology and subject matter, essential inspiration for philosophical anthropology's new presentation of the problem. It is thanks to Georg Misch that today we are able to recognize the revolution in philosophy brought about by Dilthey's ideas, whose principles Misch most recently set forth in a programmatic way in his essay "Die Idee der Lebensphilosophie in der Theorie der Geisteswissenschaften."³ If I nevertheless have to distance myself to a certain degree from the work of Heidegger, which is heavily informed by Dilthey's ideas, then that is mainly because I cannot accept Heidegger's principle in *Being and Time* (which did not come to my attention until this volume was going to press) that the study of extra-human being must necessarily be preceded by an existential analysis of the human.⁴ This idea shows him to still be caught in the spell of that old tradition (which has found expression in a great variety of forms of subjectivism) according to which the philosophical questioner is existentially closest to himself and therefore sees himself when looking toward the object of his questioning. By contrast, I defend the notion—which is meaning and legitimation of my natural-philosophical approach—that the human in his being is distinguished from all other being by *being neither closest to nor furthest from himself*. By virtue of this very excentricity of his form of life, he finds himself as an element in a sea of being and thus, despite the non-ontic [vi] character of his existence, to be of a piece with all the things in this world. It was the merit of Josef König's book *Der Begriff der Intuition* to identify, for the first time, this situation of excentricity (albeit not in these

terms and not as a form of life) as the ground and medium of philosophy.⁵ There are thus surprising connections between his systematic investigations and my own work—surprising, because neither in our respective approaches to the problem nor in our goals for our respective studies did we have an inkling of them. They remain to be elaborated upon in future publications.