

ARTICLES

Nicolai Hartmann and Vasily Sesemann The Ontological Turn and the Dialectics of Being



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ABSTRACT The aim of this paper is to examine the parallel philosophical projects of Nicolai Hartmann (1882–1950) and Vasily Sesemann (1884–1963), whose philosophical paths began when they were both studying at the German gymnasium in St. Petersburg. Both Hartmann and his lesser-known friend Sesemann are considered representatives of the so-called “ontological turn” that occurred in twentieth-century philosophy. Starting with a brief description of the history of their mutual philosophical relationships, the author explores some of the similarities in the results of their philosophical research. Their main thesis is that Hartmann and Sesemann were not only two of the many proponents of the aforementioned “ontological turn,” but that they understood and, more importantly, realized this turn in very specific ways that make their research valuable today. The authors argue that the essence of their ontological turn was an attempt to define being as a dialectical process and explain how Hartmann’s ontological analyses of spiritual being and Sesemann’s ontological analyses of mental being are related to their understanding and interpretation of Hegel’s dialectics.

KEYWORDS Dialectics of Being; Hartmann, Nicolai; Ontological Turn; Sesemann, Vasily

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1. INTRODUCTION

Nicolai Hartmann (1882–1950) and Vasily Sesemann (1884–1963) are both considered representatives of the so-called “ontological turn” that occurred in twentieth-century philosophy (e.g., Ebbinghaus 1954; Pietras 2011, 2012a; Belov 2019). Neither of them is widely known around the world. However, Hartmann, a Baltic-German who wrote in German and published his principal books at renowned German publisher (Walter de Gruyter), and who, during his lifetime, was a professor at several German universities (Marburg, Cologne, Berlin and Göttingen) as well as a member of the Prussian Academy of Sciences, is certainly far better known than his colleague. Sesemann, a Finnish-Russian-German-Lithuanian philosopher (Botz-Bornstein 2006, 7) born into the family of a medical doctor of Finnish-Swedish descent and a Baltic-German mother, a professor at Kaunas University and at the University of Vilnius, published in three languages (Lithuanian, Russian and German). Just his multilingualism alone makes it difficult to study his philosophy, and the fact that he never published his research in the form of books, but only as articles mostly published in Lithuanian journals, adds to this. The philosophical paths of Hartmann and Sesemann began together when they were studying at the German gymnasium in St. Petersburg and became very good friends for life. During their studies at the gymnasium, they spent the nights walking back and forth between each other’s apartments, discussing philosophical matters. They often spent holidays together in the rural house of the Sesemann family at the lake in Tikkala, Finland (Hartmann 2003, 10; Harich 2000, 3–4). After two years of medical studies at St. Petersburg University, Sesemann abandoned the idea of becoming a medical doctor and, following Hartmann’s suggestion, moved to the Historical-Philological Faculty there, where he studied and graduated in philosophy (Botz-Bornstein 2006, 10). In Marburg, both of them attended the lectures of Hermann Cohen and Paul Natorp. After World War I, Sesemann had difficulty finding employment, perhaps due to his peculiar ethnicity. In 1923, Hartmann recommended him for the newly opened professorship at Kaunas University in Lithuania. This finally allowed him to find employment. They both wrote papers¹ for the collection published on the occasion of Cohen’s seventieth anniversary in 1912 and, despite the fact that neither of them had become a Neo-Kantian or a phenomenologist, their research in each case remained deeply connected with both of these philosophical currents, as well as with the Russian intuitivism of their St. Petersburg

1. Hartmann, “Systembildung und Idealismus” (Hartmann 1912b); Sesemann, “Die Ethik Platos und das Problem des Bösen” (Sesemann 1912).

teacher, Nikolai Lossky. They kept in touch all their lives, visited each other, and followed and referred to each other's publications. Therefore, it seems reasonable to think that they exercised a mutual influence upon each other to some degree. They agreed on many issues, including, for instance, the one-sidedness of the epistemological view of both Neo-Kantianism and phenomenology.²

In this paper, I shall look at some of the similarities between the results of their philosophical investigations. My main thesis is that they were not just two of the many proponents of the above-mentioned "ontological turn," but also thinkers who understood and, what is even more essential, realized this turn in very specific ways—ways that make their research accomplishments valuable today. From amongst the ontological ideas they shared, I shall present those that merit acknowledgement as true realizations of the twentieth-century ontological turn, arguing that the essence of this turn lies in the recognition of the dialectical character of being.

2. NOT MERELY CALLING FOR THE ONTOLOGICAL TURN, BUT REALIZING IT
The first thing that should be noted with regard to both Hartmann and Sesemann is that they did not merely speak about the historical phenomenon of the ontological turn: i.e., they did not merely call for this kind of turn, but actually realized it themselves. They both conducted detailed ontological analyses of a sort that can be characterized as instances of new critical ontological research. In his review of Sesemann's "Die logischen Gesetze und das Sein" (Hartmann 2025: see the translation by Pietras and Cicovacki in this issue of *Forum Philosophicum*), Hartmann complains that, in spite of the general agreement about the necessity of an ontological turn, it still remains unrealized:

A "turn to ontology" is often declared, and there is no lack of thinkers who, in the spirit of the prevailing historicism, philosophize about this turn as a temporal phenomenon. This, however, is not the right way to tackle this newly developed thematic area. When one takes a closer look at what has actually happened, one finds neither the question-setting nor the declared way of research that goes beyond the most external and general preliminary questions—like the issue of the "meaning" of being [*"Sinn" des Seins*] or of the relation between cognition and being. (Hartmann 2025, 1)

2. For some important recent studies of the relationship of Sesemann's philosophy to Neo-Kantianism and phenomenology, see: (Nemeth 2022, 306–15; Jonkus 2015; 2020; 2021).

Hartmann claims that, even if some thinkers are trying to conduct ontological investigations these days, they are either just returning to the old-fashioned uncritical ontology or merely stopping at the problem areas and methodological approaches specific to such disciplines as epistemology, phenomenology, philosophy of history, or even sociology. But in all of these cases, there is still no genuinely new ontological research:

Furthermore, even the answers that are proposed for these questions are repeatedly borrowed from old speculative *weltanschaulich*³ standpoints or—which is hardly less problematic—from other adjacent problem areas from which they used their established methods: over and over again from logic, epistemology, phenomenology, and even from the philosophy of history and sociology. It is thus no wonder that the sense of ontological inquiry is missed. As a result, we still do not have the announced ontology. All we have is the announcement of the “turn” towards it. (Hartmann 2025, 1–2)

This citation shows Hartmann’s opinion regarding the then contemporary works of a so-called ontological kind. For him, the latter are either simply non-ontological or ontological but non-critical, and as a non-critical work cannot be acknowledged as a realization of the ontological turn. A typical example of the first case is Heidegger’s fundamental ontology which, according to Hartmann, was based on the incorrect replacement of the question of being *qua* being with the question of the meaning of being (Hartmann 2019, 55). From the very beginning, Heidegger’s ontology relativized all being to human being, while in the ontological analyses of Hartmann and Sesemann meaning as an element of the psychical (Sesemann) or spiritual (Hartmann) level of reality is only one kind of being, and should be considered and presented in its relation to other kinds. Therefore, according to Hartmann, Heidegger’s analyses are only nominally ontological.

Sesemann, who authored the first review of Heidegger’s *Being and Time* to be published in Russian, evaluates Heidegger’s fundamental ontology much more positively. Since he was himself working first of all in the field of the ontology of psychic being, he assessed Heidegger’s work as a truly ontological kind of work. But, in spite of this, just like Hartmann, Sesemann notes that it is only a consciousness-centered ontology. As he wrote:

3. The German word *weltanschaulich* proves difficult to translate into English. It is the adjectival form of the word *Weltanschauung*, which means worldview. Since the word *Weltanschauung* is fairly common in English-speaking literature, we decided to keep *weltanschaulich* in German.

Its subject is the phenomenological analysis of being-consciousness and determination of its meaning. It does not give a final answer to the question: what is being in general? This answer will apparently be given in the second part, which is due out in 1929. (Sesemann 1928, 120–21; my translation)⁴

According to Sesemann, Heidegger's work makes a contribution to the ontology of psychic (mental) being. One of Sesemann's objections to Hartmann in his review of the latter's *Grundzüge einer Metaphysik der Erkenntnis* was that Hartmann focuses only on the problem of knowledge of the external world and disregards that of knowledge of the inner world (Sesemann 1925a; Belov 2019, 315). In this regard, Sesemann is closer to Heidegger than he is to Hartmann. Sesemann himself starts his own ontological analyses from the field of mental (psychic) being. However, he certainly does not reduce, as Heidegger does, the whole question of being to the question of the human "meaning of being." Indeed, Sesemann, just like his teacher Nikolai Lossky, was working on the ontology of psychic being in order to provide an ontological foundation for a new scientific, but not positivistic, psychology (see Botz-Bornstein 2006, 68). But, when transitioning from the notion of psychic being to the definition of being in general, he seemed much more conscious than Heidegger that this transition could not simply be a transfer of the results obtained in the study of mental being, and that it also had to take into account the differences in the other spheres of being. This is a lesson that Sesemann learned from Hartmann's ontological pluralism.⁵

Hartmann is much more critical than Sesemann towards Heidegger's project, because he sees in it an attempt to reduce ontology as a whole to the ontology of consciousness, which *ipso facto* implies the relativization of all being to human being. Heidegger calls his ontology not just an anthropological ontology or ontology of psychic being, but a fundamental ontology: i.e., an ontology that reveals all fundamental categories (even though Heidegger uses the word "existentials") of being.

4. "Тема ее—феноменологический анализ бытия-сознания и определение его смысла. Окончательного ответа на основной вопрос: что такое бытие вообще?—она не даст. Его даст, по-видимому, вторая часть, которая должна выйти в 1929 г" (Sesemann 1928, 120–21).

5. Since they were close friends who discussed many philosophical ideas, it is very hard to establish who came up with which ones first. This is not really so important, however. Much more important is that they shared certain notions. The idea of the existence of various types of being that differ categorially was common to both of them.

One should, of course, give due credit to Heidegger for the fact that he went beyond the traditional concept of static being and tried to replace it with that of dynamic being. Therefore, Heidegger's project is certainly critical in the sense that he learned the lesson of the Kantian and Neo-Kantian critiques and their project of analyzing the subjective conditions of the objects of experience. But it seems that he had not yet grasped the real dialectical character of being. By "dialectical" I do not mean what is often understood by this term: namely, what has the form "thesis-antithesis-synthesis." What I mean is some special form of relation, this being a relation between two opposing but at the same time mutually and processually conditioned sides (originally, two positions, but according to some philosophers like Hartmann and Sesemann, also two beings). The essence of the relation consists in two aspects: (a) that these two sides (two positions or two beings) cannot exist separately from each other, because they mutually condition each other's content and existence (relational aspect), and (b) that this relation has a processual character, which means that these two sides constantly interact and mutually change their content through this interaction; in the case of two dialectically related positions, the back-and-forth debate between opposing sides produces a kind of linear progression or evolution in philosophical views or positions, whereas in the case of two dialectically related beings, the constantly repeating actions and reactions between two opposing sides produce a similar progression or evolution in these two beings (processual aspect). This understanding is much closer to Hegel's original thought than the thesis-antithesis-synthesis interpretation (see, e.g., Mueller 1958). In Hegel's philosophy, one of the examples of such a relation is the master-slave relationship: the master exists and is what (s)he is only because of the existence (*Dasein*) and content (*Sosein*) of the slave, and vice versa. (For more about Hegel's notion of dialectics, see Maybee 2020). The dynamization of being in Heidegger's ontology results from the subjectivization of the object. Heidegger understood the object's dependence on the subject, but missed the inverse relationship, and thus failed to grasp the real dialectical subject-object relation.

In relation to Hartmann's concept of stratified being, Sesemann distinguishes various levels of mental life, which lead him to overcome thegnoseological dualism of objective and non-objective knowledge. In contrast, Heidegger's ontology appears to be still grounded in this dualism, and this is the main reason why he considers all scientific knowledge grounded in the objectified (onto-theological) concept of being to miss the true essence of the latter.

Hartmann was aware of the superiority in this regard of Sesemann's philosophy, relative to other ontological theories of that time. He accordingly rated Sesemann's research very highly. In his review of the latter's "Die logischen Gesetze und das Sein" ("Logical Laws and Being"), he wrote:

Sesemann's book brings us something quite different. Here is neither only a talk "about" ontology nor merely an introduction to it. The author does not even attempt an introduction. He goes straight to the point. That this is a genuine ontological investigation, and one that must be understood as such, becomes clearer when following its progress than any review can show. Its significance lies entirely in its content and the formulation of its questions, and its procedure can only be assessed from its content. And the content is indeed significant. The work actually develops at least a portion of basic ontological questions. (Hartmann 2025, 2)

Nevertheless, in order to better understand why Hartmann approves of Sesemann's ontological project more than other similar ones (including Heidegger's), one must look in more detail at the similarities between the philosophical projects of Hartmann and Sesemann.

3. THE ONTOLOGIZATION OF THE PROBLEM OF COGNITION

What is common to all of the three aforementioned projects (i.e., those of Hartmann, Sesemann, and Heidegger) is the ontologization of the problem of cognition, which had been solved in a different manner by the Neo-Kantians. Just as, in rereading Kant, the Neo-Kantians developed a critical theory of cognition, Heidegger, Hartmann and Sesemann proceeded to the next step and advanced different critical ontologies of cognition. According to these critical ontologies, the problem of cognition itself is inseparable from the problem of being. Hartmann expressed this most clearly by writing that "there is no question of knowledge without the question of being. This is because there is no knowledge whose whole meaning would not consist in knowledge of 'what is.' Knowledge is precisely the being-in-relation of a consciousness to something-that-is" (Hartmann 2012, 316).⁶ Just like

6. "Es gibt keine Erkenntnisfrage ohne Seinsfrage. Denn es gibt keine Erkenntnis deren ganzen Sinn nicht darin bestünde, Seinserkenntnis zu sein. Erkenntnis ist eben ein Bezogensein des Bewußtsein auf ein Ansichseiendes" (Hartmann 1924, 125). I am providing the original version of these sentences because, in the English translation, the German word *Ansichseiendes* is translated as "something-that-is." Such a translation loses the link to one of Hartmann's most substantial notions: namely, that of being-in-itself (*Ansichsein*). In order to stress this connection, the German *Ansichseiendes* should rather be translated as "something-that-is-in-itself."

Sesemann and Heidegger, he begins his ontological research with the ontology of cognition, which he developed in *Grundzüge einer Metaphysik der Erkenntnis*. According to him:

The critical epistemology, which wanted to be a prolegomenon to all metaphysics that will be able to appear as a science, is right insofar as it is clear that it is itself metaphysically founded, and only because of that is it able to weigh up metaphysical problems. . . . But from this it follows obviously that it [i.e., the critical epistemology—A.P.] is only half the truth, only one side of the correlation that has to be seen here as a whole. The other side of their own essence is that there is also a critical metaphysics, which is the indispensable prolegomenon to every such epistemology.⁷

From the above it follows that “epistemology presupposes metaphysics just as much as metaphysics presupposes epistemology, they are mutually dependent.”⁸ This recognition must lie at the foundation of real critical philosophy.

Both Hartmann and Heidegger have been recognized by some scholars as post-Neo-Kantians, insofar as their projects for a new ontology can be read as attempts to return to Kant’s original thought from its Neo-Kantian epistemological reading (Noras 2004; Pietras 2011; 2012a). Yet there is a very significant difference between them, which makes Hartmann closer to Sesemann than to Heidegger. Hartmann did not simply reject Neo-Kantianism, but took into account its analyses and used its results in his own ontology. He claims that Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* is a theory of cognition as well as an ontology, while Heidegger maintains that it is no theory of cognition at all, but only an ontology (Pietras 2011, 249). Therefore, one can say that Hartmann dialectically sublated (*aufgehoben*) the philosophy of the Neo-Kantians, while Heidegger simply rejected it. This sublation leads him to formulate a new, more critical concept of being.

7. “Die kritische Erkenntnistheorie, welche ein Prolegomenon aller Metaphysik sein wollte, die als Wissenschaft wird auftreten können, ist im Recht, soweit sie sich darüber klar ist, daß sie selbst metaphysisch gegründet und nur dadurch in der Lage ist metaphysische Probleme . . . abzuwägen. Aber eben aus diesem »soweit« folgt offenbar, daß sie nur die Hälfte der Wahrheit, nur die eine Seite eines Wechselverhältnisses ist, das hier als ganzes benötigt wird. Die Kehrseite ihres eigenen Wesens besteht darin, daß es auch eine *kritische Metaphysik* gibt, welche das unentbehrliche *Prolegomenon einer jeden Erkenntnistheorie* ist” (Hartmann 1921, 5).

8. “*Erkenntnistheorie setzt Metaphysik ebenso sehr voraus, wie Metaphysik Erkenntnistheorie, sie bedingen einander gegenseitig*” (Hartmann 1921, 6).

Hartmann enriched the fundamental ontological concept of being *qua* being with the results of the epistemological investigations of Kant and the Neo-Kantians. This concept is no longer the same as in pre-Kantian ontology. Hartmann's ontology cannot be simply treated as a return to pre-Kantian non-critical ontology or metaphysics. He explains this unequivocally in the first part of his ontological trilogy:

The ontological concept of being-in-itself may thus be described as a return of the ontological perspective from the *intentio obliqua* to the *intentio recta*. That which has been sublated [*das Aufgehobene*—A.P.] preserves as its own the determination from which it stems, strictly according to the Hegelian law of “sublation” [*Aufhebung*—A.P.]. The sublated is not simply identical with “being *qua* being,” for nothing has been sublated in the latter. It is, in fact, just the look which “being *qua* being” takes on when our perspective returns from the reflective to the natural standpoint. Ontological being-in-itself is the *Aufhebung* of the reflective stance incorporated in gnoseological being-in-itself. Ontically, everything that there is, in any sense whatever, is being-in-itself. This includes that which “is” only *in mente*. The *mens*, with its contents, is itself a thing that exists (spiritual being). (Hartmann 2019, 167–68; 1935b, 154)

The Neo-Kantian investigations were, according to Hartmann, instances of valuable research conducted from a reflective perspective (*intentio obliqua*), which should not simply be rejected but rather sublated in a new ontological return to the *intentio recta*. But this return cannot be a move back to the old classical non-critical conception of being *qua* being; rather, it should itself change and reformulate this concept. This reformulation can be interpreted as the real ontological turn.

This is where the ideas of Hartmann and Sesemann connect. Moreover, Sesemann, who—as I mentioned above—was working on the ontology of psychical being (i.e., the ontology of *mens*), was conscious that what is *in mente* is itself only some kind of being. He understood that when it comes to dealing with the ontological structure of the world one must analyze the being of human *mens*. Yet he does not reduce all being to this ontological area: rather, he wants to analyze the relations between the various spheres of being. In both Hartmann's and Sesemann's ontologies, there is no privileged sphere of being similar to the existential sphere of Heidegger's fundamental ontology.

4. THE ONTOLOGICAL TURN AS A TURN OF ONTOLOGY ITSELF

Hartmann is skeptical about other contemporary ontological projects, because he does not consider them sufficiently critical. What he wants to do is to establish a new critical concept of being. This “critical” concept, as has been shown, changed by first turning into the *intentio obliqua* (Kant and post-Kantian German philosophy) and then back into the *intentio recta* (the ontological turn). But this way, which had been followed in the historical development of philosophical thought from the *intentio recta* to the *intentio obliqua* and back, did not reduce but rather supplemented the ontological concept of being. What Hartmann expects from the new twentieth-century ontology is a synthesis of the various categorial contents revealed throughout the development of philosophy, and it is precisely such a synthesis that he provides in his multi-leveled pluralistic ontology. This is why he was fighting over the entire course of his career against every form of reductionism. According to him, unfortunately, the majority of contemporary ontologies exhibit some kind of reductionism.

One of the most essential features of the new concept of being is its dialectical character. Hartmann’s ontology is not only pluralistic, but also dialectical: it is pluralistic insofar as it distinguishes many ontological spheres, and it is dialectical (i.e., relational and processual at the same time)⁹ because its core consists of categorial and modal laws that capture the relations between these various spheres. One of the reasons why Hartmann values Sesemann’s ontology more than that of others is the latter’s recognition of the fact that the relation between subject and object is essentially dialectical.

Thorsten Botz-Bornstein rightly observed that the starting point of the new branch of philosophy established and developed by Hartmann and Sesemann, which he called ontological gnoseology, was Kant’s question: “How can the same objects be real and ideal at the same time?” (Botz-Bornstein 2006, 34) They make this possible by presenting an ontological structure that can reconcile subjectivism and objectivism, which means that subject and object are treated as mutually co-determinate. When analyzing the process of cognition, Sesemann distinguishes objective (*gegenständliches*) from non-objective cognition (*ungegenständliches Wissen*) (Sesemann, 1927a), and Hartmann distinguishes the kind of being that has been objectified¹⁰

9. On these two aspects—namely, the relational and the processual—of the dialectical relation, see footnote 5.

10. “Erkenntnis ist die Objektion eines Seienden an ein Subjekt, Objektwerdung des Seins” (Hartmann 1955, 156–62).

(i.e., object-being, *Objektsein*) from the kind of being that has not been objectified (i.e., trans-objective being, *transobjektive Sein*) (Hartmann 1921, 156–62). They are, as a matter of fact, speaking about one and the same thing, albeit from two different perspectives. Behind both these distinctions lies a consciousness of the dialectical relation between the subject and the object. Moreover, this recognition of the mutual relational character of the subject and the object frees them both from the relativism in which Heidegger remains entrapped (see Pietras 2012a; 2011). What differentiates relationism from relativism is the fact that the former acknowledges a two-sided dependence rather than a one-sided one. If one claims that every object is related to the subject but not the other way around, this is relativism, but if one claims that the object and subject are mutually related, it is relationism. Similarly, if one claims that every sphere of being is related to the sphere of human meaning (mental or spiritual being) but not the other way around, it is relativism, but if one claims that there are many dialectical (mutual and processual) relations between every one of these spheres of being, it is just a kind of relationism.

Hartmann's new critical concept of being includes both epistemological concepts of being: being-in-itself and being-for-me. As Hartmann writes:

To the extent that ontology has to do with the question of givenness, it cannot avoid the concept of being-in-itself despite its equivocality, for givenness is a cognitive affair. The givenness of being at once casts the entity "in itself" into oppositional relation to the "for me." We can thus distinguish ontological being-in-itself, in which this relation is dialectically sublated, from gnoseological being-in-itself, which exists only in the oppositional relation. Here it is necessary, however, to execute the dialectical sublation in the right direction: not toward the subject, but toward "being qua being." Seen from the subject's point of view (according to the "principle of consciousness"), all being-in-itself is dialectically sublated into being for me (something standing across from me); seen from the perspective of "being qua being," all being-in-itself, as well as being-for-me, is dialectically sublated into "what is" as such. (Hartmann 2019, 167)

In other words, the distinction between being-in-itself and being-for-me is only an epistemological distinction. Therefore, the concept of being-in-itself is not an ontological but rather an epistemological one. The real ontological concept is the concept of being *qua* being. But, in the course of the development of the history of philosophy, the concept of being-in-itself has become equivocal (Pietras 2011, 239–42; 2012a, 27–53). We have

to distinguish its epistemological from its ontological meaning. Hartmann argues that the ontological concept of being-in-itself (which is, as a matter of fact, the modern equivalent of the concept of being *qua* being) sublates both these epistemological concepts: being-in-itself and being-for-me.

But the most important point here is that, according to Hartmann, all attempts to sublate the dialectical relation between subject and object—discovered by Kant and explored in detail by the Neo-Kantians—toward the higher (or, in other words, deeper) subjective perspective, as, for instance, Heidegger did, amount to a mistake that makes all these kinds of project critical but not ontological. Hence, Heidegger's philosophy is critical, but not truly ontological¹¹—just as, for instance, the philosophies of Schopenhauer and Eduard von Hartmann can be called ontological, but not critical.

5. THE MEANING OF HEGEL'S DIALECTICS

As was already mentioned, the core of the ontological turn of Hartmann and Sesemann is the recognition of the dialectical character of being. In 1935, Hartmann and Sesemann published, in the same issue of the journal *Blätter für deutsche Philosophie*, papers pertaining to the understanding of Hegelian dialectics, in which they argued for an ontological conception of dialectics. These are Hartmann's "Hegel und das Problem der Realdialektik" (Hartmann 1935a) and Sesemann's "Zum Problem der Dialektik" (Sesemann 1935). The main issue of these papers is the question of what the real value of Hegel's dialectical method consists in. They agree that "the formal scheme of Hegelian dialectics (the three steps—thesis, antithesis, and synthesis) does not exhaust its very essence. The real meaning of dialectics cannot be found in Hegel at all." (Sesemann 1935, 28; my translation)¹² There is nothing unusual about the view that Hegel is not himself aware of the true meaning of the dialectic, because, as both Hartmann and Sesemann claim, awareness of the method is always secondary to its use (Sesemann 1935, 29; Hartmann 1912a, 122–23; 1935a, 6). The real meaning of Hegel's dialectics cannot be reduced to a new philosophical method. As a matter

11. As a matter of fact, from this perspective Heidegger's philosophy remains much more Neo-Kantian than he would himself admit. It seems that Emil Lask, who is recognized in the history of philosophy as one of the last representatives of Southwest Neo-Kantianism, was closer to the ontological turn of Hartmann and Sesemann than Heidegger was. Heidegger himself was deeply influenced by Lask. On the relationship between Heidegger and Lask, see: (Hobe 1971; Kisiel 1995; 2009; Pietras 2012b).

12. "das formale Schema der Hegelschen Dialektik (der Dreischritt—Thesis, Antithesis, Synthesis) ihr eigentliches Wesen gar nicht erschöpfe. Eine wirklich ausreichende Bestimmung, was Dialektik ist, wäre bei Hegel überhaupt nicht zu finden" (Sesemann 1935, 28).

of fact, dialectics as a philosophical method is itself nothing new, since we can already find it in Plato and, Hartmann claims, in Aristotle. What was considered the dialectical scheme (thesis, antithesis, synthesis) in post-Hegelian philosophy is only a formalization of this way of thinking and, like every formalization, it consists in the abstracting of some content or matter. The latter is in fact what matters most here. In order to understand the essence of dialectics, one cannot merely pay attention to what is abstracted, because the method always remains related to its object.

According to both of these two friends, the real value of Hegel's philosophy lies in its uncovering of the dialectical character of being itself. They also claim that in relation to dialectics one has to distinguish at least two separate spheres: (1) a sphere of the dialectics of our description of being and (2) a sphere of the dialectics of the object of this description, meaning the dialectics of being itself. In order to answer the question of the meaning of dialectics, one has to focus on the relation between these two spheres.

As a consequence of rethinking the entire tradition of transcendental philosophy, Hartmann and Sesemann reject the assumption of the identity of being and thought underlying Hegel's system. They argue that one has to distinguish these two spheres. This does not mean that these spheres are completely different, however. On the contrary, as a consequence of the evolution of philosophy from Kant through German idealism and Neo-Kantianism to contemporary philosophy, the ontological turn follows from the acknowledgment of the partial identity of being and thought. Hartmann expresses this idea in *Metaphysik der Erkenntnis*, wherein he claims that there is a partial identity between the categories of being and the categories of cognition. He understands this thesis as an interpretation of Kant's supreme law of *a priori* synthetic judgments (Hartmann 1921, 303–12). Sesemann expresses the same idea in his three papers related to the problem of cognition published in different installments under the title "Beiträge zum Erkenntnisproblem" ("Contributions to the Problem of Knowledge").¹³ In "Die logischen Gesetze und das Sein" ("Logical Laws and Being," 1931), Sesemann analyses the relation between the sphere of logical laws and the sphere of psychical being, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the relation between the logical laws and the sphere of what he calls "daseins-autome Sein," which can be understood as every other non-psychical sphere

13. Part I: "Über gegenständliches und ungegenständliches Wissen" ("On Objective and Non-Objective Knowledge") (Sesemann 1927a), Part II: "Rationales und Irrationales" ("The Rational and the Irrational") (Sesemann 1927b), and Part III: "Das logisch Rationale" ("The Logical Rational") (Sesemann 1930). On this matter, see also "Die logischen Gesetze und das Sein" ("Logical Laws and Being") (Sesemann 1931).

of being (as an object of outer experience). He claims that, in both cases, there is neither total identity nor total difference between the sphere of logical laws and the sphere of being. His doctrine of non-objective knowledge (i.e., of some psychical form of experience not ordered in accordance with logical laws of thought) as well as his doctrine of irrational being (i.e., of some form of non-psychical external being not so ordered) is nothing other than an expression of the thesis of the partial identity of thought and being.

But Hartmann's and Sesemann's thesis of the partial identity of thought and being is nothing other than a sublation of two extreme theses: (1) The thesis of the total identity of thought and being (which can lead to one or other of two possible forms of reductionism, these being metaphysical realism or objectivism, and metaphysical idealism or subjectivism) and (2) the thesis of the total difference of thought and being (which leads to skepticism). In the ontologies of Hartmann and Sesemann, the sphere of thought turns out to be only one of the several spheres of being.

In consequence, as mentioned above, both philosophers distinguish the dialectics of being from the dialectical method, and explore the relationship between these. In his 1935 paper, Sesemann asks three questions: (1) What is the formal structure of dialectics? (2) What is the objective value of dialectics—i.e., to what extent can dialectical concepts capture the real becoming of being? (3) What is the real meaning of the dialectical method? He starts with the first question and provides the following description of the logical scheme of Hegel's dialectics:

This back and forth between thesis and antithesis, their mutual tension, in which both are preserved and sublated, results in their unity in synthesis. The "sublation" (in the positive sense) comes from the fact that together with this sublation of the isolation (in the negative sense) the contradiction (as incompatibility, mutual exclusion) is also sublated, and its positive side—namely, the correlativity, the inner togetherness [of thesis and antithesis—Pietras]—is revealed as authentic and true.¹⁴

14. "Dieses Hin und Her zwischen These und Antithese, ihre gegenseitige Spannung, in der beide erhalten und aufgehoben werden, ergibt ihre Einheit in der Synthese. Die 'Aufhebung' (in positiven Sinne) kommt dadurch zustande, daß mit der Aufhebung der Isolierung (in negativen Sinne) auch der Widerspruch (als Unvereinbarkeit, gegenseitige Ausschließung) aufgehoben wird, und seine positive Kehrseite—nämlich die Korrelativität, die innere Zusammengehörigkeit—als das Eigentliche und Wahre in den Vordergrund tritt" (Sesemann 1935, 36–7).

The question thus arises: to what extent does the dialectical structure hereby presented adapt logical concepts to the dynamic of real becoming? Firstly, “the dynamic of continuous flow is not reached directly but only indirectly, namely, in this way that the static of the isolated view (*Ansicht*) is worked out in its strict purity; driven to the extremes, it breaks its own limits and turns into dynamism.”¹⁵ Secondly, in the dialectical description, the transition from thesis to antithesis occurs not gradually but suddenly. Sesemann points out that in his dialectical system Hegel uses Kant’s distinction between reason and intellect in a specific manner. According to Hegel, intellectual cognition and all its methods, like analysis, abstraction, fixation, are static and grounded in formal logics, while cognition through reason is dynamic and grounded in dialectics. But only this dialectical cognition through reason is a source of formal logics and allows for further developments. Speaking in the terms of contemporary cognitive sciences, one could say that, according to Sesemann’s interpretation of Hegel, intellectual cognition is indeed algorithmic and thus reliable. However, the only source of these algorithms is dialectical (and thus itself non-algorithmic) reason. In other words, logical laws are nothing other than algorithms provided by dialectical (non-algorithmic) reason to intellectual thought. Of course, our most powerful cognitive faculty (i.e., dialectical reason) can also be the source of our biggest mistakes, if one loses sight of the proper relation between thought and being.

Then, in relation to the second question, Sesemann presents more detailed analyses of these basic dialectical notions: namely, thesis, antithesis, and their opposition. He claims that the opposition between thesis and antithesis follows from the isolating activity of thinking. Putting forth a thesis is a theoretical activity of isolation of some determinations that are not isolated in the non-theoretical (or pre-theoretical) being itself. By “isolation,” Sesemann means choosing some determinations from the range of these, and using them without regard to their connections with others. When someone looks at something in front of themselves, and says “this is x,” they select the feature x, focus on it, and for the moment ignore the other features of that thing; they isolate this individual feature (this one concrete determination) of the thing from the entirety of its factual determinations. To put it another way, they consider only one of the many aspects or sides

15. “Die Dynamik des kontinuierlichen Fließens wird nicht unmittelbar, sondern nur auf indirektem Wege erreicht, und zwar dadurch, daß die Statik des isolierten Ansicht in strenger Reinheit heraus gearbeitet wird; auf die Spitze getrieben, sprengt sie ihre eigenen Schranken und schlägt in Dynamik um” (Sesemann 1935, 37–8).

of being that stand in front of them. Since both thesis and antithesis have been produced in this way, this isolating activity is a cause of the opposition between thesis and antithesis. As Sesemann writes, “from what has been said, the necessary connection in the dialectic is clear: isolation produces the contradiction because it sets what is in itself indeterminate (or not clearly determined) as something absolutely determinate.”¹⁶ He emphasizes that the indeterminacy (indefiniteness) of the concept resulting from its abstractness and generality is not an empirical indeterminacy resulting from the empirical imperfection of the concept, but an indeterminacy that needs other concepts for its sublation (*Aufhebung*). This indeterminacy of the isolated concept obtained in the cognitive process is itself what generates its dialectical opposition.¹⁷ According to Sesemann, dialectical development consists in a process of determination—i.e., a process of capturing various species-characteristics of the generic concept in order to eliminate its indeterminacy and clearly define it. To synthesize the negative moment of opposition is insufficient, and this is a proof of the ontological basis of dialectics. One can read:

It is thus not enough to say: the dialectical contradiction removes the isolation of the theses-concept (*Thesenbegriffs*) and completes its determination with the help of other concepts. It is not a question of any arbitrary concept, but rather of contrary opposition. To it befalls the dialectical process. This shows that the basis of dialectics is ultimately not a logical one, but rather an ontic one. It does not arise from the formal-logical relation between position and negation, but rather from the factual connection of opposites. The synthesis expresses its essential systematic connection. It thereby also realizes the transition from the abstract to the concrete, from the unstructured to the structured, from the part (the moment) to the whole, from the conceptually ideal to the reality of being as a whole.¹⁸

16. “Aus Gesagten erhellt der notwendige Zusammenhang in der Dialektik: die Isolierung erzeugt den Widerspruch, weil sie das an sich Unbestimmte (oder nicht eindeutig Bestimmte) als ein schlechthin Bestimmtes setzt” (Sesemann 1935, 41).

17. According to Nikolai Lossky—the teacher of both Hartmann and Sesemann—the cognitive process just is in its very essence nothing other than differentiating by means of comparison (Lossky 1919, 226).

18. “Es genug also nicht zu sagen: der dialektische Widerspruch hebt die Isolierung des Theisenbegriffs auf und Vollzieht seine Determination mit Hilfe von anderen Begriffen. Es handelt sich nicht um irgendwelche beliebigen Begriffen, sondern um den konträren Gegensatz. Ihm fällt die dialektischen Prozesse zu. Das zeigt, daß die Grundlage der Dialektik letzterdings nicht eine logische, sondern ontische ist. Sie erwächst nicht aus der formal-logischen Beziehung von Position und Negation, sondern aus dem sachlichen Zusammenhang von Gegensätzen.

With Sesemann, just as with Hartmann, dialectics turns out to be, first of all, the logic of the real process of human cognition: i.e., the logic of mental—or in Hartmann's terms, spiritual (cultural)—being, and with this also the logic of the development of our concepts. Because of this, Sesemann claims that in order to answer his second question—that of the validity of the ideal structure of dialectical logic when it comes to grasping the real process of becoming—one has to start from the description of real being. To examine the usefulness of dialectics, it is necessary to describe real being and to look in it for the logical structures of dialectics. Since the indeterminacy of the concept is a feature of the ideal logical sphere, the question is whether the same indeterminacy exists in the structure of real being. Sesemann's answer is the same as in his earlier paper "Die logischen Gesetze und das Sein" ("Logical Laws and Being," 1931): namely, that real becoming always remains incomplete and unfinished, where this entails its uncertainty. He writes:

Real dialectics, just like the dialectics of concepts, is based on two moments: [on the one hand—Pietras] the indeterminacy of the abstract concept in its isolated being-in-itself corresponds to the apeironic nature of becoming, i.e., more precisely, the indeterminacy and incompleteness that manifests itself in every single actual moment of becoming. And, on the other hand, just as in the logical sphere, there is, behind the contradiction, the positive contrary opposite, so it is, in the temporal occurrence, the tendency and the transition to the other that generate the dialectical tension.¹⁹

After pointing out these similarities between the ideal dialectics of concepts and the real dialectics of becoming, Sesemann proceeds to his last question: that of the real meaning of the dialectical method.

Both Hartmann and Sesemann claim that Hegel's dialectics has great objective value, albeit not as a formal methodological schema that can just

Die Synthese bringt ihre wesensnotwendige systematische Verbundenheit zum Ausdruck. Sie realisiert damit zugleich den Übergang von Abstrakten zum Konkreten, vom Ungegliederten zum Gegliederten, vom Teil (Moment) zum Ganzen, von Begrifflich-Idealen zur Realität des Seins als Ganzen" (Sesemann 1935, 45).

19. "Realdialektik beruht ebenso wie Begriffsdialektik auf zwei Momenten: der Unbestimmtheit des abstrakten Begriffs in seinem isolierten Ansichsein entspricht die Apeironnatur der Werdens; d.h. genauer die Unbestimmtheit und Unabgeschlossenheit, die sich in jedem einzelnen aktuellen Moment des Werdens bekundet—Und so wie anderseits in der logischen Sphäre hinter dem Widerspruch der positive, konträre Gegensatz steht, so sind es auch im zeitlichen Geschehen die Tendenz und der Übergang zum anderen, welche die dialektische Spannung erzeugen." (Sesemann 1935, 49)

be blindly repeated (i.e., without any reference to experience or material that can count as given). Moreover, the history of philosophy has shown that treating Hegel's dialectics as a pure formal scheme leads to huge misunderstandings and mistakes. Hartmann notes the following:

In the Hegelian School, dialectical thought had become dogmatic, an excrescence, almost a disease. The craftsmanship of Hegel was something unique, something that could be neither inherited nor imitated [*nachgebildet*]. The imitation [*Nachbildung*] had to become mimicry [*Nachahmung*], and the mimicry to become mere schema.²⁰

Hegel's mastery consists in this: that he actually captures the object, which is, according to Hartmann, the dialectical becoming of spiritual being. His followers did not capture anything, but only dogmatically followed this formally described schema. In consequence, dialectics was considered an absurdity and Hegel a charlatan. Sesemann agrees with Hartmann on this matter, and notes that:

dialectics is a permanent integral part of all true philosophy, but not the dialectical method. There is hardly any great philosophical doctrine that does not contain, explicitly or implicitly, dialectical moments. This is because the unity and interpenetration of the opposites is a fundamental ontological problem that even today has not lost its validity. The fundamental dimensions of being, the opposite structure of which manifests itself in dialectics, are still largely unexplored and undeveloped. The dialectical method, however, is only of secondary significance: it is only the logical form of the presentation of the dialectics of being. Perhaps it can also sometimes be used as an experimental tool to uncover a still hidden dialectics of being. But where it wants to be something more and declares that it has priority, it leads to an unrealistic rationalism that not only remains unfruitful but is also—especially in our times—adverse to philosophical style. It robs the real dialectics of being of its sharpness; just as in the case of the monotonous use of paradoxical twists in artistic expression, the true value of paradoxes is covered over, and one thereby achieves the opposite of what was intended.²¹

20. "Das dialektische Denken war in der Hegelschen Schule dogmatisch geworden, ein Auswuchs, fast eine Krankheit. Die Meisterschaft Hegels war etwas Einziges, sie konnte nicht vererbt, nicht nachbildet werden; die Nachbildung musste zur Nachahmung, die Nachahmung zum Schema werden" (Hartmann 1935a, 4, trans. F. Tremblay).

21. "Dialektik ist ein bleibender wesentlicher Bestandteil aller wahren Philosophie, nicht aber die dialektische Methode. Es gibt wohl kaum eine philosophische Lehre großen Stils,

6. THE DIALECTICS OF MENTAL BEING, OR OF CULTURAL BEING?

Sesemann's considerations regarding the similarities between ideal and real dialectics can be seen as a kind of inquiry into the categorial relations between various spheres of being that is—according to Hartmann—the essence of the new critical ontology. This was certainly one of the reasons why he appreciated Sesemann's philosophy so greatly. But, in spite of all these similarities between their investigations of the meaning of dialectics, there are also some significant differences.

The most substantial point of contrast between Hartmann's and Sesemann's analyses of the dialectics of being seems to be a consequence of the difference in the starting points of their ontological researches. While analyzing the problem of cognition, Hartmann is mostly interested in outer experience. As was mentioned above, this was one of the three objections that Sesemann leveled against Hartmann in his review of *Grundzüge einer Metaphysik der Erkenntnis*: that Hartmann focuses on exploring the problem of knowledge of the external world and disregards that of knowledge of the inner world. Of course, the difference could be seen as a mere divergence of philosophical interests and, since no researcher can analyze all problems in detail, this objection of Sesemann could easily be rebutted. Just like Lossky, Sesemann was deeply involved in the development of the ontological foundations of the new scientific, but not positivistic, psychology, while Hartmann, who himself dealt with many spheres of being corresponding to various scientific disciplines, was not particularly concerned with psychology or its corresponding sphere of mental processes. But from this contingent difference of interests arose some differences in their positions on the objective value of Hegel's dialectics. They agree that to reveal the real validity of the dialectical method one has to conduct not only logical but also, first of all, ontological investigations into the structure of being. Yet

die nicht, offen oder verhüllt, dialektische Momente in sich enthielte. Denn die Einheit und Durchdringung der Gegensätze ist ein ontologisches Grundproblem, das auch heute nichts an Aktualität eingebüßt hat. Noch liegen ja die fundamentalen Seinsdimensionen, deren gegensätzliche Struktur sich in der Dialektik manifestiert, zum großen Teil unerforscht und unerschlossen da.—Der dialektischen Methode kommt dagegen nur sekundäre Bedeutung zu: sie ist zunächst lediglich logische Darstellungsform der Seinsdialektik. Vielleicht kann sie mitunter auch versuchsweise als Hilfsmittel verwandt werden, um einer noch verborgenen Seinsdialektik auf die Spur zu kommen.—Wo sie aber mehr sein will und für sich den Vorrang beansprucht, da führt sie zu einem wirklichkeitsfremden Rationalismus, da bleibt sie nicht bloß fachlich unfruchtbar, sondern wirkt auch—besonders in unserer Zeit—als philosophische Stilwidrigkeit. Sie nimmt der echten Seinsdialektik ihre Schärfe; ähnlich wie auch die monotone Verwendung paradoxaler Wendungen in der künstlerischen Sprache den wahren Wert des Paradoxons verhüllt und damit das Gegenteil von dem, was sie beabsichtigt, erreicht" (Sesemann 1935, 58–9).

because of the differences in their specific ontological interests, they find the real meaning of dialectics in different spheres of being: Sesemann in the sphere of mental being studied by psychology, and Hartmann in the sphere of spiritual (cultural) being studied by the humanities and social sciences.

The comparison between these two points of view can be made from two different directions. Whereas the distinction between the mental and the spiritual levels of human reality is crucial for Hartmann's ontology, Sesemann did not make that distinction. When Sesemann speaks of human cognition or human consciousness, he is rather treating these two spheres, which Hartmann clearly separates, as part of one sphere of human mental life (understood as an object of inner experience). For Sesemann, a much more significant distinction is that between inner and outer experience (see Sesemann 1925b). Hartmann is not concerned with this distinction as much as Sesemann, because he is much more interested in the problem of the foundation of the humanities and the social sciences (i.e., the sciences related to the spiritual level of reality).²² This implies that he cares much more about the distinction between psychic and spiritual being than about the distinction between inner and outer experience. Hartmann's spiritual being includes both objects given in inner experience and objects given in outer experience. One can even say that at the spiritual level of reality the distinction between inner and outer experience loses its conceptual sharpness. In other words, the line between inner and outer experience becomes blurred at the spiritual level of reality. This is because, in line with the methodology of sociology, the objective spirit is given to us only indirectly through two other forms of spiritual being: namely, the personal spirit, which is more related to inner experience, and the objectified spirit, which is more related to outer experience. Therefore, one can say that from the empirical point of view the objective spirit is only some kind of correlation between these two other forms of spirit, and for this reason objective spirit sublates the sharp opposition between inner and outer experience.

At the same time, one can also explore the difference between the analyses of Hartmann and Sesemann from Sesemann's point of view. Maybe Sesemann's analyses of acts of inner experience in its relation to human consciousness, which he treats as a mental process, can resolve some of the difficulties generated by Hartmann's position. One of these possible issues

22. Hartmann's book *Das Problem des geistiges Seins* (*The Problem of Spiritual Being*) is dedicated in its entirety to the problem of the ontological foundation of the humanities and the social sciences, as is evidenced *expressis verbis* by its subtitle: *Untersuchungen zur Grundlegung der Geschichtsphilosophie und der Geisteswissenschaften* (*Investigations into the Foundations of the Philosophy of History and the Humanities*).

is the question of the relation between the mental level of reality and the personal spirit (i.e., personality), as one of the three forms of the spiritual (cultural) level. On my interpretation, for Hartmann the conceptual border between mental and spiritual being is the formation of the reflective self and the beginning of the process of objectivization. But all the comments of Hartmann and Sesemann on the partial identity between the dialectics of concepts and real dialectics should also apply to their own ontological conceptions. This means that the real transition between various levels of reality can partially differ from every conceptual articulation of such a transition. Maybe any sort of sharp border between these two levels of reality (i.e., the mental and the spiritual) is itself merely something conceptual. In being itself, this transition appears rather gradual. And, because of that, a clear border between mental and spiritual being cannot be found. This is what Sesemann's analyses of the various levels of consciousness reveal. Moreover, advances on this matter made by contemporary cognitive sciences and philosophy of mind suggest that the problem of the transition from pre-reflective (or non-reflective) to reflective consciousness and self-consciousness, when analyzed in detail, is gradual rather than sudden.²³ This means that dialectics, the ontological roots of which Hartmann is seeking in the spiritual level of reality, can also be found at the lower levels. It is highly probable that at the psychic level of reality (which itself cannot be so easily distinguishable from the spiritual one) dialectics can occur in a very similar and nearly indistinguishable way. The aforementioned differences between Hartmann and Sesemann become even more obvious when one considers that the difficulty of identifying categorial differences between layers becomes greater the closer these layers are to one another.

In spite of these differences in their ontological analyses, Hartmann and Sesemann agreed that Hegel's true insight pertaining to the problem of dialectics was his discovery of the dialectical structure of being. The indeterminacy of the abstract concept in ideal dialectics corresponds to some kind of indeterminacy of real being in real dialectics. This discovery turns out to be crucial for their own ontological investigations. Regardless of the (mental or spiritual) sphere of being in relation to which they discover this fact, the ontologies of Hartmann and Sesemann are ontologies of dialectical being: i.e., of that being that turns out to itself be a dialectical process, rather than the unchanging permanent being of classical ontology.

23. See, for instance, Antonio Damasio's three-layered theory of consciousness (Damasio 1999) or Gallagher and Zahavi's considerations in relation to such concepts as "consciousness," "self-consciousness," "self," and "person" (Gallagher and Zahavi 2008).

7. BEING AS DIALECTICAL PROCESS

The new ontology—i.e., ontology after the turn—should be an ontology of real dialectical being. In his review of Sesemann's paper (Hartmann 2025), Hartmann maintains that his friend demonstrates how the structure of being differs from the structure of logical laws. Classical logical laws are the laws of determination. But being itself, both psychical being as an object of inner experience and non-psychical being as an object of outer experience, is very far from being completely determinate. Sesemann explores how the structure of the classical logical notion of being differs from the structure of being from two angles: (a) that of subject-related mental being (epistemological being-for-us) and (b) that of "autonomous being" (epistemological being-in-itself).

In relation to the former, he observes that "consciousness is very far from being completely subordinate to logical structures" (Hartmann 2025, 2). One can find many cases of indefiniteness, indeterminacy, and indistinctness not only in emotional mental life but also in our theoretical consciousness. According to Hartmann, Sesemann explores various levels of perception to show that:

indeterminacy is not a mere epiphenomenon that only arises in the subsequent reflection as a result of gaps in memory, since it can be shown to be in the original perception itself, in which the form of "empty space" of the whole view [*die Form von „Leerstellen“ der Gesamtauffassung*] is already present. (Hartmann 2025, 3)

Many parts of the original content of theoretical consciousness (e.g., colors, light, shadows, noises and smells) lack the "thingness" presupposed by classical logical laws. They are only secondarily idealized, objectified, or reified, in consequence of using the classical logical static concept of being. In his philosophical works, Sesemann analyzes many examples of such a non-objective form of psychic (mental) being, not only in relation to the problem of knowledge, but also in reference to other phenomena of mental life—such as, for instance, dreams construed as non-verbal mental phenomena (Sesemann 1931; Botz-Bornstein 2006). These various phenomena of inner experience should also be considered to be in some way related, and one can analyze dreams as a non-objective remainder of the cognitive process of objectification.

Nevertheless, for Hartmann, what are more substantial are the analyses of being by Sesemann that he found in the second part of the latter's

paper “Autonomous Being” (*Daseinsautonomen Sein*). There, Sesemann shows that the most basic feature of real being is its “motion” (*Bewegung*). Autonomous being is itself a “becoming” (*Werden*). In Hartmann’s ontology, all this pertains to real being. Every real being is not only temporal, but also processual. It differs from the ideal being of logic, mathematics and values. Being as becoming is always unfinished, and is thereby not wholly determined. This is why classical formal logic does not correlate with the structure of real being. He notes that “ancient thought was completely dominated by logical laws; it made their validity a ‘criterion of true reality.’” (Hartmann 2025, 4)

Zeno’s famous paradoxes of motion are nothing other than a consequence of the attempt to subordinate all our experience under such a logical conception of being. Hartmann and Sesemann agree on this point with famous thinkers like Heidegger, Bergson and others, that the classical Parmenidean concept of being is inappropriate to describe being as it is given to us in experience. Hartmann claims that this classical concept of being, based on the spatialization (where space itself is conceived as discrete) of the temporal, is still applied in modern physics. The new critical ontology should change this, because such a conception “does not in any way capture the continuity of the flow as such. Its idea of time is abstract.” (Hartmann 2025, 4) The physical notion of time is a “logical abbreviation of real concrete time” (Hartmann 2025, 4), and it is a consequence of the subordination of real being, which in its essence is always in motion, under the logical conception of being as a permanent and unchanging thing or substance. At this point, writes Hartmann, “the investigation then turns into a modal analysis. The indeterminacy of becoming in the present ontologically presupposes the ‘multiplicity of possibilities’ as a kind of future horizon.” (Hartmann 2025, 5) As is well known, Hartmann’s ontology largely consists of categorial and modal analyses. Now one can see how the categorial analyses of the various spheres of being lead both Hartmann and Sesemann to modal analysis. As a result of the categorial analyses, their recognition of only a partial identity between classical logical concepts and the spheres of being leads them to a reformulation of the classical modal categories.

They both acknowledge that, as a consequence of the temporal and processual character of real being, real possibility is not the same as ideal logical possibility. The ideal possibility grasped by classical formal logic is only a partial possibility. In other words, what is logically possible does not have to be really possible. According to Hartmann, the following law applies to the real modalities: “Whatever is really possible is also really actual. Whatever is really actual is also really necessary. Whatever is really

possible is also really necessary.” (Hartmann 2013, 133) This may sound controversial and counterintuitive, because we are used to operating only with logical modalities, and such a law is definitely invalid for logical possibility, actuality and necessity. However, what is logically possible is not yet actual, but only possible. And what is actual is itself not logically necessary, because it is only actual. This is because the logical modalities relate to ideal static and unchanging being, and not real temporal and processual being.

This seems like a controversial law: one according to which real possibility, actuality and necessity are only three different aspects of one and the same state. The statement that what is really possible is also really actual loses all paradoxicality when one realizes that:

the real possible is only that which has had all of its conditions fulfilled, right up to the very last one. As long as a single condition goes unfulfilled, the thing in question is not possible, on the contrary, it is impossible. Accordingly the fulfillment of the conditions means nothing less than its real being-present, thus, its real-being-actual. (Hartmann 2013, 56; 1938, 50)

The paradoxicality here is only epistemological, and follows from the fact that one is using the concept of logical unchanging being to think about real changing being. All real being is a becoming (a process). What is actual in one moment of this becoming is not actual in the next. Due to constant changes occurring in the world as a whole, the underlying conditions furnishing the basis for the real actuality (and thus also for the real possibility and real necessity) of some state in the present were unfulfilled in the past, and will be unfulfilled in the future. What makes us treat logical possibility and logical necessity as the only forms of possibility and necessity is the dominance of the logical idea of being. But logical possibility and necessity are different from real possibility and necessity. Logical possibility, which is always a disjunctive possibility, refers to some variability on the part of states that are really only partially possible, which means that there are various states that could occur in the future with the same or a different probability if the rest of their conditions were fulfilled. But because each of them requires different sets of conditions, only one of them can occur. By contrast, logical necessity is the mode of a being containing all its conditions in itself, which means that at any time during its existence it does not need to fulfill any further conditions; it is eternal, never appears, and never disappears. And yet, for the same reason, at least according to Hartmann, its mode of being can only be ideal. It can be a part of the real world only as one of the conditions of some real being, never

as an autonomous real state. Logical necessity applies to ideal objects such as logical or mathematical laws.

Sesemann, who, according to Hartmann, also included “modal problems in the temporality of becoming” (Hartmann 2025, 6), recognized all these differences between ideal and real modalities. He noted that:

in the sphere of real occurrences [*Geschehens*] the conditions of what is possible are also never completed, because, as long as the event is still occurring, it remains unfinished in its totality. The totality itself “is” not, but rather “becomes.” When it reaches its completeness, the occurrence [*Geschehen*] comes to an end; the possibility turns into actuality. It then no longer belongs to the future, but rather to the past. (Hartmann 2025, 6)

Sesemann contrasts static logical possibility with dynamic real possibility, and claims that only as a consequence of our process of rendering static what is in itself dynamic can one think of being as something complete and wholly determinate. Yet real being is itself a becoming and, as long as it is going on, becoming is never entirely determinate and definite.

Therefore, the foundation of the indeterminacy of real being, which corresponds with the indeterminacy of the concepts revealed in Hegel’s dialectics, is nothing other than the processuality of real being. The processuality of real being means that all real being is always a becoming and that, as a becoming, it is just as real at every moment of its becoming. On the one hand, there are no ontologically privileged (i.e., more real than others) moments or stages of becoming. On the other hand, when one focuses on a particular moment or stage by means of abstract concepts, and thereby artificially privileges it, one can consider a set of possibilities to be contained in this moment, whose variability consists in nothing other than the incompleteness of the conditions pertaining to a future real actual moment.

8. CONCLUSION

As has been shown, Hartmann and Sesemann not only believed that an ontological turn in philosophy was necessary, but also realized this turn in very specific ways. The return of philosophical thought from its orientation towards cognition—which started with modern philosophy—back to the original philosophical question of being cannot be, for them, a simple reversion to classical ontology. According to these two friends, the ontological turn itself needs to be a turn of ontology: more specifically, a dialectical transformation of the concept of being. Moreover, this transformation can

be viewed as a consequence of the evolution of knowledge. Ever since the empirical turn of the seventeenth century, which began with Francis Bacon and resulted in the success of Newtonian physics, philosophy has aspired to deal with what is given. To do so, it cannot ignore the results of the special sciences. Finally, it is not only the deep philosophical analyses of the problem of cognition, as in the case of Hartmann and Sesemann, but also and above all the contemporary scientific discoveries of all of the natural sciences, humanities, and social sciences that lead to the conclusion that reality is essentially processual, relational and dialectical. On this view, the new critical ontology, which probably needs to be accompanied by developments in logic, is an ontology of temporal, processual, and in its very essence dialectical real being. Hartmann and Sesemann, who still remain little known, were amongst the pioneers of this new dialectical concept of being, and it is this that makes their analyses so valuable and worthy of study.

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