The New Ontology and Modern Philosophical Anthropology

On an Elective Affinity Between Two Twentieth-Century Theories

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Abstract We find an elective affinity between two theories of the early twentieth century, namely between Hartmann's New Ontology and the modern Philosophical Anthropology of Scheler, Plessner, and Gehlen, a strongly motivated affinity or alliance: it becomes an elective affinity between both approaches insofar as both detach themselves from their seemingly natural bonds: the modern philosophical anthropologist detaches himself from the connection to the classical modern subject of philosophy, while the New Ontology abandons the connection to the old teleological metaphysics. Both perspectives, i.e., of Philosophical Anthropology and of the New Ontology, understand the human being neither as a being that posits the world and values nor do they understand the world as the result of a transcendent instance of meaning. The potential of this modern alliance between Philosophical Anthropology and the New Ontology, formed in the "Cologne Constellation" of the 1920s, has only recently been (re-)discovered (Fischer 2012; 2020; 2021). It could entail—as has been said with regard to some other previous theories—a potential for some as yet "untapped" enlightenment with regard to current theoretical debates in the twenty-first century.

Keywords Cologne Constellation; Gehlen, Arnold; Hartmann, Nicolai; New Ontology; philosophical anthropology; Plessner, Helmuth; Scheler, Max

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1. Introduction

In this article it is argued that while the "New Ontology" of Nicolai Hartmann, and the "Philosophical Anthropology" of Scheler (and Gehlen) and especially Plessner, stand on their own as theories, there exists between them an elective affinity.[1] The sociogenetic metaphor of "elective affinity" is derived from the field of chemistry, and refers to relations between substances. Goethe applied this term to the socio-erotic sphere of interaction in his novel *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* (*Elective Affinities*, 1809). An elective affinity is always present when chemically different substances—or, by analogy, different characters—withdraw, because of their chemical or interpersonal affinity and attraction, from already existing bonds to enter into new ones. It turns out that in a chemical or social reaction these very elements are particularly attracted to each other and fly, as it were, towards each other. In this article, we will—leaving chemistry and Goethe behind—transfer the metaphor to theoretical relationships.

It is in this sense that we encounter an elective affinity between two theories of the early twentieth century: namely, Hartmann's New Ontology and the modern Philosophical Anthropology[2] of Scheler, Plessner and Gehlen. These approaches exhibit a strongly motivated affinity or alliance that becomes an elective affinity between them insofar as both detach themselves from their seemingly natural bonds: the modern philosophical anthropologist detaches himself or herself from the connection to the classical modern subject of philosophy, while the New Ontology abandons the connection to the old teleological metaphysics. Neither of these perspectives—meaning those of Philosophical Anthropology and the New Ontology, respectively—understands human beings as positing the world and values, or construes the world as being the result of a transcendent instance of meaning. The potential of this modern alliance between Philosophical Anthropology and the New Ontology, formed in the "Cologne Constellation" of the 1920s, has only recently been (re-)discovered (Fischer 2012; 2020; 2021; Hartmann 2014; Wunsch 2010, 2014). It could entail—as has been said of some other antecedent theories—a potential for some as yet

1. English translation by Susan Gottlöber.

2. In German philosophy, it has become common since the beginning of the twenty-first century to distinguish between "philosophical anthropology" as a discipline (non-capitalized) and "Philosophical Anthropology" as a paradigm (capitalized) (see Fischer 2008, 14–16). In this paper, "Philosophical Anthropology" always refers to the paradigm. The same applies to "New Ontology" (capitalized): this refers to the strata-ontological paradigm of Hartmann.

"untapped" enlightenment with regard to current theoretical debates in the twenty-first century.[3]

In part two of the paper, an attempt will be made to reconstruct a systematic relationship between the New Ontology and Philosophical Anthropology at the theoretical level. The goal is on the one hand to understand Hartmann's ontology as a (historico-genetic and systematic) condition for the possibility of anthropology (Scheler, Plessner) (see Section 2.1), and on the other to show philosophical anthropology as being the innermost center of Hartmann's ontology (see Section 2.2). It will then conclude with an assessment in which the considerable theoretical-historical and theoretical-systematic relevance of the rediscovery of this elective affinity between two important groups of theories of the twentieth century is contrasted with other ways of thinking (see Section 3).

2. Systematic Determination of the Relationship between the New Ontology and Philosophical Anthropology

Telling the story of the elective affinity between two philosophical theories of the twentieth century is only meaningful in order to draw attention to the possibility of mutual gain for both theories in terms of intellectual history and philosophical systems. Philosophical Anthropology as a rediscovered and updated paradigm (Fischer 2008; Thies 2004, 2009; 2018; Honenberger 2013) elevates the New Ontology of Hartmann and, *vice versa*, the more the New Ontology of Hartmann is recognized and discussed in terms of its sophisticated argumentation (Hartung and Wunsch 2014; Kalckreuth, Schmieg and Hausen 2019), the clearer the design and significance of modern Philosophical Anthropology will become. Thus, a way will be opened up to consider, in the main part of this article, the theoretical-systematic relationship between Hartmann's New Ontology and Plessner's Philosophical Anthropology. First of all, we will ask to what extent Hartmann's philosophy as New Ontology created, from the mid-twenties on, the conditions in which modern Philosophical Anthropology became possible (see Section 2.1). We will then ask, on the other hand, to what extent the Philosophical Anthropology developed by Scheler and Plessner, and later by Gehlen, forms a latent center that systematically links the various parts of Hartmann's philosophy up until the next phase (see Section 2.2).

3. For new research on Hartmann see *The Philosophy of Nicolai Hartmann* (Poli, Scognamiglio,Tremblay 2011) and *New Research on the Philosophy of Nicolai Hartmann* (Peterson, Poli 2016).

2.1. Hartmann's Ontology as a Condition for the Possibility of Philosophical Anthropology

In terms of the elective affinity between the New Ontology and Philosophical Anthropology, there are two aspects to be distinguished from the point of view of the latter: on the one hand, its affinity with Hartmann's epistemology, and on the other, its affinity with Hartmann's ontology of strata. From Hartmann's point of view, the theorems relevant to philosophical anthropology date from the twenties: the epistemological theorem from *Metaphysik der Erkenntnis* (*Metaphysics of Knowledge*) from 1921 (Hartmann 1921), and the ontological one from the great article "Kategoriale Gesetze" ("Categorial Laws") from 1925/26, published in Plessner's *Philosophischer Anzeiger* (*Philosophical Gazette*) (Hartmann 1925/26).

To begin with, this affinity on the epistemological level of a classical-modern epistemological theory is obvious. Hartmann's *Metaphysik der Erkenntnis* marked his departure from transcendental Idealism, especially from the neo-Kantianism of the Marburg School, whence he himself came. In this book, he presents philosophical concepts and arguments as a kind of epistemological justification of the New Ontology that stimulated the development of the versions of Philosophical Anthropology put forward by both Plessner and Scheler. Plessner shared with Hartmann the desire to escape from neo-Kantianism: that is, to break away from its starting point of philosophizing at the inner circle of consciousness and the self-reflection of consciousness as the basis of philosophy. In *Metaphysics of Knowledge*, Hartmann tried to show how one can, at one and the same time, both respect the immanence of consciousness, for which the objects are given, and observe the subject-object relation as a correlation of being. As Plessner (1979, 68), in his later review of Hartmann's *Das Problem des geistigen Seins* (*The Problem of Spiritual Being*), summed up this theorem of his realistic epistemology: "Hartmann hält die Subjekt-Objekt-Relation einer flankierenden Bestimmung für fähig und unterwirft sie einer ‚Betrachtung von der Seite' aus" ("Hartmann considers the subject-object relation to be capable of a consideration from a side-on view." Plessner 1979, 68).

This Hartmannian theorem—namely, that the subject-object relation is a relation of being in the world, which can be observed and described from the side, from a distanced lateral view—matches exactly, according to Scheler and Plessner, the very insightful descriptions of the manifold organism-environment relations in the world offered by Jakob von Uexküll. The theorem enables Scheler and Plessner, in their philosophico-anthropological projects, to start out not with the rationality of the mind (the self-reflection of subjectivity), but with the objective pole, living beings, which

they observe in their correlation with a corresponding environment from a side-on view, as a "correlation of life-form and life-sphere"—i.e., as though constitutive of a preforming of the subject-object relation. During his visit to Marburg, Plessner had noticed the huge telescope in Hartmann's study, which shaped his distant view of phenomena and relations (König, Plessner 1994, 58). It is this distant view of the body in the cosmic environment that also shapes Philosophical Anthropology: especially the thesis that anthropology should not begin with one's own consciousness or with one's own corporeality and condition, but rather with a philosophical biology of the remotely positioned organism. Plessner's first working title for the "Levels" (1928), "Pflanze, Tier, Mensch. Zur Kosmologie der lebendigen Form" ("Plant, Animal and Human. On the Cosmology of the Living Form"; (Plessner 2002, 12), points to this theoretical affinity between Hartmann and Plessner, who both shared the cosmological view.

The other theorem, the ontological one, which is central to the conception of Philosophical Anthropology, is deeply linked to the epistemological one. If the epistemic relation between the knower and the known is always also a correlation between something and something else, then epistemology is founded in ontology and not *vice versa*. Hartmann's theorem of the ontological stratification of being played a central and strategic role in the Philosophical Anthropology of Scheler and Plessner. In order to achieve an adequate concept of the human being, they follow Hartmann's thoughts on the emergence of the strata (i.e., their non-teleological emergence), each with its own categorial novelty, with simultaneous recurrence and modification of already existing categories of strata upstream—a theorem which Hartmann described in "Categorial Laws" (1925/26) in terms of laws of categorization or stratification. This then later moved to the center of the main work of his ontology, *Der Aufbau der realen Welt* (*The Structure of the Real World*, 1940), wherein he describes reality as an emergence or a structure of strata of being: inorganic nature, organic nature, the psychic and the spiritual. The psychic and spiritual beings are inserted into the real world—that is the first point of ontological theory. The strata are not reducible to each other, each has its own categorial characteristics. At the same time, a certain hierarchy, basically a double hierarchy, is observable from the bottom up and the top down, in which a higher stratum depends on the existence of the lower one, but in which, at the same time, as a new stratum, the higher has a categorial margin of manoeuvre over the lower. This categorial dimension—the relative "novelty" of the respective strata—distinguishes the higher from the lower ones in terms of their relative autonomy (the first,

upwards-oriented hierarchy), but still leaves the latter stronger as the supporting ones (the second, downwards-oriented hierarchy).[4]

In this way, one can view the affinity of Plessner's (and also of Scheler's) construction of Philosophical Anthropology through Hartmann's eyes. The philosophical anthropologists (Plessner 1975; Scheler 1995) start their investigation not with the thinking ego, the subjective pole, but with the objective pole—namely, the thing, and especially the living being. This means that they start with a philosophical biology. They both arrive at the concept of the human being through the detour of an ontology of the material, and then the living, being. Against naturalism, and especially Darwinism, their analysis makes use of the theorem of categorial stratification to avoid a reductionism of higher to lower strata. The primary distinction is between living and non-living matter, the second is between different types of living being (especially between plants and animals), and the third is between higher primates (between monkeys and humans). Each higher stratum rests, respectively, on the previous one and is conditioned by it, but possesses its own categories. The approach thus begins with the objective pole and comes from below through a non-teleological stratification, as if by a detour, to arrive at a complex conception of the human being and his or her special position in nature.

Let us now put this internal connection between the New Ontology and Philosophical Anthropology in Scheler and Plessner to the test. One can see the New Ontology in Scheler's work of Philosophical Anthropology *Der Stellung des Menschen im Kosmos* (*The Position of Man in the Cosmos*, 1928). Spirit, as a categorial novelty, rests in its realization upon the next lower stratum, the practical intelligence, and on all other levels such as "associative memory," "instinct," or "urge," but spirit as spirit has its specific, original mode of operation, the operation of negation, so that man as a complex of strata from urge to spirit is a "naysayer," able to say "no" (Scheler 1995). The "no" is a categorial novelty of the spirit, whereas the energy to be able to say "no" comes from the urge.[5] The inner connection between the New Ontology and Philosophical Anthropology can be seen most clearly in Plessner's concept of "eccentric positionality," which he proposes in regard to the concept of the human being in *Stufen*

4. For key ideas on the modern ontology of strata, see also Rothacker (1961).

5. On the reconstruction of Scheler's Philosophical Anthropology by means of Hartmann's ontology, see especially Wunsch (2012). Wunsch also arrives at the assessment that "Hartmann's doctrine of the categories . . . presents a systematic support for the position of the philosophical anthropology of the 1920s" (Wunsch 2012, 162).

des Organischen und der Mensch (*Levels of Organic Life and the Human*) (1928) (Fischer 2000).[6] If we look closely, we can see that this key concept of Philosophical Anthropology amounts to an integrative conception of strata. It contains the level of the inorganic, the material: namely, in the concept of "position"—everything is a space-time-position in the cosmos, a positivity. Differentiated from this is the vital stratum as "positionality," which means that living beings are set in space and time as spatio-temporal phenomena that follow a new type of determination in the space-time claim. In this stratum lie all the vital categories as pointed to in this context by Plessner, such as metabolism, growth, reproduction, etc. Differentiated from this is the term "centric positionality," enfolded in the term "eccentric positionality," which refers to animal phenomenality: centric (or even frontal) positionality, including its stimulus-response pre-forms, refers to the psychic stratum, the phenomenon of consciousness (and the associated categories of perception and cognition). Finally, "eccentric positionality" refers to the phenomenality of the spirit—the category of distance, and negation in relation to all other preceding stratifications. Here, in this stratum of spiritual beings, lie the categories of acting and understanding, of setting goals, of reference to meaning, of the subjective, the objective, and objectified spirit. Within such "eccentric positionality," each of the higher categories presupposes a series of lower ones (i.e., centrality, positionality and position, eccentricity, centricity), without being already predisposed in the latter; positionality (or life) also works without centrality and, above all, without eccentricity.

With the complex concept of "eccentric positionality," which ingeniously highlights the interlocking of the strata, one is brought to see most clearly the internal theoretical-systematic connection of Hartmann's New Ontology and Plessner's Philosophical Anthropology. The philosophical-anthropological formula of "eccentric positionality" is, as it were, the congenial counterpart to Hartmann's stratological formula of "independence in dependence." Plessner himself noted this at the beginning of 1928, when he explained in detail the difference between his approach in *Levels of Organic Life and the Human* and that of Heidegger's *Being and Time* in a letter to Josef König, where he characterized it stratologically thus: "With him [i.e., with Heidegger] . . . the structures appear in one [!] stratum, while I take a further step in that the structures are distributed among different strata and the human being (*Dasein*) contains the layers in itself—which for Heidegger has to remain hidden" (König and Plessner 1994, 181).

6. For Plessner's Philosophical Anthropology, see especially Wunsch 2014, Fischer 2018.

2.2. Modern Philosophical Anthropology as the Core of Hartmann's New Ontology

The significance of Hartmann's philosophemes from the 1920s onward for the design and elaboration of the Philosophical Anthropology of Scheler and Plessner, and then also of Gehlen, should now be straightforwardly evident.[7]

How would it work the other way around? To what extent could the modern Philosophical Anthropology of Scheler, Plessner, and later Gehlen, be relevant for the formation of Hartmann's "systematic philosophy" as a whole, including the core of the New Ontology?

It is striking that Hartmann himself, in designing his systematic philosophy and looking back at it retrospectively, does not even identify a specific position for a theory of the human being. This is evidenced by the fact that in the detailed retrospective article on his philosophy published in 1949 in the *Philosophenlexikon* (*Lexicon of Philosophers*) he himself assigns—and in this order—to each of the following (along with the corresponding works and projects) its own place in his thought: "ontology," "natural philosophy," "philosophy of mind," "ethics," and, finally, also "aesthetics," "epistemology" and "logic." He does not, however, provide a systematic location for anthropology (Hartmann 1949). One could say that a theoretical and systematic connection between his own overall work and Philosophical Anthropology occurs only after the development and elaboration of his New Ontology in the thirties and forties. This connection evolves hesitantly and gradually under the influence and impression of the growing philosophical interest in "anthropology," which he himself promoted again and again This is most evident in Hartmann's review (1940/1941) of "Arnold Gehlen, *Der Mensch, seine Natur und seine Stellung in der Welt*" (Arnold Gehlen, *Man, His Nature and His Position in the World*), under the title "Neue Anthropologie in Deutschland" ("New Anthropology in Germany"), which Hartmann reads carefully against the background of his own critical ontology of strata (Gehlen 2009). Also, the essay "Naturphilosophie und Anthropologie" ("Natural Philosophy and Anthropology") from 1944 once again takes up this theme. One could also view the 1942 volume *Systematische Philosophie* (*Systematic Philosophy*), conceived

7. To what extent Gehlen's *Der Mensch* (*The Human Being*) is actually compatible with Hartmann's ontology of strata is an unfinished discussion. At the beginning of the fifties, Gehlen wrote an article intended for the Hartmann commemorative book (but not in fact published in the latter) in which he distanced himself from any theory of strata (Gehlen 2008; see also Rehberg 2008). On the other hand, in all later editions of his main work Gehlen mentions Hartmann's ontology in an appreciative manner (see Morgenstern 1997, 168).

and composed by Hartmann, as hinting at the relevance of Philosophical Anthropology to his own philosophy, insofar as Hartmann, as editor, begins it with two contributions from two protagonists of Philosophical Anthropology—Gehlen's "Zur Systematik der Anthropologie" ("On the Systematics of Anthropology") and Rothacker's "Probleme der Kulturanthropologie" ("Problems of Cultural Anthropology")—before continuing with his own contribution entitled "Neue Wege der Ontologie" ("New Ways of Ontology"). It then concludes with three contributions: Bollnow's "Existenzphilosophie" ("Existential Philosophy"), Wein's "Das Problem des Relativismus" ("The Problem of Relativism"), and Heimsoeth's "Geschichtsphilosophie" ("Philosophy of History") (see Hartmann 1942). Hartmann's awakened interest in the explicit position of anthropology within his own thought becomes very clear in the lectures *Einführung in die Philosophie* (*Introduction to Philosophy*) from 1949, where, in the part entitled "Einführung in das heutige philosophische Denken" ("Introduction to Contemporary Philosophical Thought"), after the section on "Epistemology," he deals explicitly with "Die Stellung des Menschen in der Welt" ("The Position of the Human in the World") (this being based on the book titles of Scheler and Gehlen)—only then progressing to the themes of "Aufbau der realen Welt" ("Structure of the Real World") (ontology), "Ethik" ("Ethics") and "Ästhetik" ("Aesthetics") (Hartmann 1950b).

For those acquainted with both theories—i.e. Hartmann's New Ontology as well as Philosophical Anthropology—it is not surprising to see him incorporate the latter into the former. One could surmise that, in retrospect, Philosophical Anthropology functions as the unstated, implicit point around which his works, which go far beyond it, are centered (as was already observed by Wein 1965, 95–101; see also Stallmach 1982). A paradox could be that he saw himself as encouraged and supported in his own philosophical activity by the development of such a Philosophical Anthropology on the part of minds he himself held in high esteem, and with whom he felt an elective affinity from the twenties through to the forties. At the same time, however, because of the audacity and strength of these approaches, he saw himself as being released, but also discouraged, from systematically developing and working through such a Philosophical Anthropology himself. Again, maybe he no longer had the time to spell out this connection in all its consequences himself—a connection which he saw very clearly in his mind at the end of his work.

In this respect, the contribution also performs a service to philosophy, inasmuch as we are led to point out and develop this evident point of connection—the affinity of his ontology of strata, his philosophy of nature, his

philosophy of the spirit, his epistemology, and his ethics with the theorems of modern Philosophical Anthropology.

It is clear that, with the project of a New Ontology, Hartmann goes far beyond anthropology from the outset: it is about beings and their rudimentary fundamental distinctions, the categories. In doing so, the modes of existence "reality and ideality," and the modes of existence "possibility and reality," and "necessity and randomness," must be reconstructed completely independently of human beings. Hartmann also reconstructs the structure of the real world (which stands at the center of his project of a New Ontology) with its "fundamental categories" and "special categories" for being *per se*—but not in terms of the human being. And yet, at the heart of his ontological theory—that the real world is built up in strata, in four strata that are separate from each other (the inorganic, the organic, the psychic, and the spiritual strata)—the being of the human inevitably comes into play. In particular, the categorial laws (which are not laws of nature) of the relationships of the strata to each other, in which the composition of the real world as a structural type is rooted, manifest themselves primarily in human beings. Thus, it is not surprising that the decisive twofold categorial law of ontology as it pertains to strata—namely, the "law of strength" ("the lower categories are the stronger ones") and the "law of freedom"—"the higher categories, regardless of their dependence on the lower ones, are nevertheless free (autonomous) with regard to them with respect to novelty of content"—appears implicit in the case of the human being.

> The meaning of this twofold law is the "resting" of the higher structures "on" the lower ones: the spirit is carried by the life of the soul, the life of the soul by the organism, the organism by the physical structures and their energies (a law that cannot be reversed at any point)—and, at the same time, the non-merging of the higher structures in precisely this dependence. (Hartmann 1949, 457)

Hartmann explains this principle of autonomy in dependence prominently, though not exclusively, in terms of humans:

> The latter (the non-merging of the higher structures into the lower ones) positively signifies the addition of new, more content-rich and in this sense "higher" categories in every higher stratum. Thus, new, superior principles of form appear in the organic, which are not understandable from the physical point of view; even more so new ones in the psychic, and completely in the

> spiritual life, without, however, breaching the dependence of "resting on". (Hartmann 1949, 458)

Hartmann's ontology needed an encounter with anthropology, because it is precisely in the human being—as in no other being—that there exists the complexity of the intertwining of the strata—in the human being, in its sphere, all categories appear in a densification of being.

However, Philosophical Anthropology also stands in the background of Hartmann's "natural philosophy" on the one hand, and on the other his philosophy of spirit. It was not until 1950 that Hartmann's *Philosophie der Natur* (*Philosophy of Nature*) appeared, whose conception he had already worked out at the end of the 1920s (Hartmann 1950a). This book explores the categorial foundations of the natural sciences, from atomic physics to astrophysics and biology. He finished the book *Das Problem des geistigen Seins* (*The Problem of Spiritual Being*) in 1932. It contains "studies into the foundation of the philosophy of history and the humanities" (Hartmann 1933), the conceiving of which dates back also to his years in Cologne. In the aforementioned Göttingen lecture of 1949, Hartmann notes that under the title "Der Mensch und seine Stellung in der Welt" ("The Human Being and His Position in the World"), one must distinguish between the topic of "the position of the human being in nature" and that of "the common world created by man himself." Now, Hartmann's philosophy of nature is not devised in such a way that it serves to uncover the position of man in the cosmos—as is, for example, that encountered in Plessner's project, already announced in the title of *Levels of Organic Life and the Human*. Plessner intends to arrive at a Philosophical Anthropology from the premise of a natural philosophy, especially a philosophy of the organic. Rather, Hartmann develops the philosophy of nature from the point of view of the exception of man in the ontological attitude, simply as a "special theory of the categories of the two lowest strata of being, the physical-material and the organic" (Hartmann 1949, 458). He firstly treats the "dimensional categories," such as space and time, then the "cosmological categories," such as process and state, substantiality and causality, interaction and the law of nature, in order to then reveal the categories of "dynamic structures" with their forms of determination, central and holistic determination, and the category of "dynamic equilibrium." Hartmann, familiar with the use of his telescope, is aware of the fact that the categories of "stages" of the dynamic structure "range from the atom to the spiral nebula," and thus, in this sense, from the smallest to the "largest systems." And yet he makes a characteristic remark in this context, which throws light on the position of a particular being in the cosmos: "In the realm

of the stages of structures the highest forms do not lie with the largest systems (the cosmic ones), but obviously in the middle—with the range of what is accessible to our [! J.F.] senses. . . . Here again, the organic structures occur" (Hartmann 1949, 459). Insofar as Hartmann now seeks to unfold, between the cosmological microcosm (of atomic structure) and macrocosm (of the spiral nebula), a mesocosmos with its organological categories (life-form and life-process, balance of processes, preservation of the shape-structure with change of substance, etc.), up to "organic determination" as a specific organic purpose, he thinks—without making it explicit—that here "the human being's position in nature" is free in relation to nature: a being that arises from a change in the species of the organic, of phylogenesis.

The most explicit point in his philosophy where Hartmann refers to Philosophical Anthropology is in the context of his philosophy of "spiritual being" (*The Problem of Spiritual Being*, 1933). In fact it is, systematically considered, the transitional point between his philosophy of nature and his philosophy of culture—or, in Hartmann's words, the turning point between the "position of the human being in nature" and the "position of man in the common world he created" (Hartmann 1933a, 95). As is well known, Hartmann distinguishes, in his ontology of spiritual being, "the fundamental forms of spirit—the personal, the historico-objective and the objectified spirit" (Hartmann 1949, 459), which are irreducible to each other. He begins with the "personal spirit," then develops the categories of the "objective mind," and ends with the "objectified spirit" of artifacts. In order to generate the category of the personal spirit at the very beginning, he decidedly incorporates Plessner's philosophico-anthropological category of the "positionality of the eccentric form" acquired from the comparison between animals and humans, in order to characterize the spiritual consciousness of the human being through its characteristic ability to engage in a distantiation of itself from its environment. This ability is what distinguishes the latter from animal consciousness.[8] If everything organic, as the philosophy of nature shows, stands in an environmental relation, and in concrete terms in a relation of metabolism, then Hartmann's philosophy of the spirit is concerned with the turning point that goes from the natural environmental relation to the spiritual relation to the world. Referring to Plessner, Hartmann states that:

8. Hartmann, who rarely quotes, here explicitly refers to the "new research in the border region between animal psychology and anthropology" in the "explanations of H. Pleßner" in the *Levels of Organic Life and the Human* (1928), especially chapters 6 and 7 ["Die Sphäre des Tieres" ("The Sphere of the Animal") and "Die Sphäre des Menschen" ("The Sphere of the Human Being")] (Hartmann 1933, 94 f.).

> the animal consciousness has the form of a frontal position against its environment, not in perception alone, but in the whole fullness of its life relations to theirs, its vulnerability, reactivity and activity. This "frontality" has its "closed form" through the central position that consciousness itself assigns to it, in which it "sets itself up." According to the expression of Plessner, this is the "positionality of the closed form". (Hartmann 1933a, 95)

Moreover,

> Against this, the spiritual consciousness stands out through its joint knowledge of its own involvement in the given world and the randomness of its position in it. With this realization, its own being positioned moves away from being the center of the given world, and thereby the world ceases to be a mere "environment"—because the environment is the world centered on the subject—it is to its "the world," that is, the real world, in which it stands as a co-living being. (Hartmann 1933a, 95)

Again, Hartmann quotes Plessner:

> This changed position to the world is, understood as a form of consciousness, its "positionality of the eccentric form." The world that has been given to the human being is no longer characterized by his circumference, he no longer sees it as surrounding him and focused on him as the centre. The position he places himself in is—seen from its point of view—an eccentric position. (Hartmann 1933a, 95)

From the anthropology of the spiritual life-form of the human being, Hartmann draws a consequence that is important for his (i.e. Hartmann's) ontological attitude: "He (the human being) no longer orientates the world towards himself but rather orientates himself towards the world, and thus he begins to orientate himself objectively in the world." (Hartmann 1933, 95)

If one has come so far in the reconstruction of anthropology in Hartmann's systematic philosophy—his "philosophy of nature" as well as his philosophy of "spiritual being"—then one can, finally, also follow the traces of this in his epistemology and ethics. In 1921, with *Metaphysik der Erkenntnis* (*Metaphysics of Knowledge*), Hartmann had achieved a breakthrough in his own philosophy, by clarifying the relation of cognition as an "apprehension" instead of a "production" and exposing the subject of cognition as a part of being, which can partly recognize being. Although the subject is unable to "get out of itself" in perception and in *a priori* cognition,

it grasps being "outside of itself." As Hartmann says, the "problem of knowledge can be clarified by recovering its natural starting point, ontology" (Hartmann 1949, 466). It is of the greatest importance to him to show that in the cognitive relation, that which is grasped is more than the "object" of the cognition in question—i.e. that besides being an object for a subject it is also a being in itself. In this respect, the relation of cognition is also in itself ontologically a relation of being:

> If one assumes that only a part of the world surrounding us is known at any time, then as a result of the respective limit of the objectivation, a "courtyard of the objects" is raised up, one which exists with respect to the cognitive stock of the subject, beyond which lies, however, an unlimited world of the "trans-objective," that is, the unrecognized. (Hartmann 1949, 466)

Again, in the cognitive process as such, this first boundary, the objectivation boundary, shifts, and at the same time a second boundary manifests itself, "the boundary of objectability or recognizability (rationality)," and it is drawn through the arrangement of the "cognitive apparatus" of the subject. Beyond this second boundary lies the "trans-intelligible" (Hartmann 1949, 466). In his much-discussed Halle lecture from 1931 on the "Problem der Realitätsgegebenheit" ("The Problem of the Givenness of Reality"), Hartmann—already under the influence of Scheler's and Plessner's anthropology and the "turn of contemporary philosophy to ontology and realism"—had anthropologized this ontological epistemology even more strongly, by embedding the cognitive phenomenon in the phenomenon of life. The actual acts of thinking, the acts of consciousness, of perception, of judgment, of imagination, and of ascertaining, have always, in this way, already been embedded in the "emotional-transcendent acts" of living subjects. And it is these emotional-transcendent acts which, in the acts of expectation, fearing, hoping, solicitude, experiencing, suffering, willing, and desiring affirm in an irresistible manner the "weight of the real," to which the acts of consciousness refer. The insertion of all acts of cognition into this context of life proves the hardness of the real: this cognitive anthropology (as one might call it), which shows the "being affected" of the living subject in the emotional-transcendent through reality, demonstrates the cognitive phenomenon first of all as a subject-object relation, as a correlative relationship between act and object. At the same time, the "consciousness of the independence of the object from the subject" (Hartmann 1931, 86) occurs in the cognitive phenomenon through the experience of the life subject.

To come full circle: already in his *Ethics* (from the mid-twenties, appreciated by Scheler, and written under the influence of the latter's informal value ethics), Hartmann needed to presuppose an anthropology of the complex layered being in the form of the human being in order to be able to fulfill the aim of his own informal "value ethics." The fact that Hartmann's *Ethics* of 1926 could only have been worked out in the wake of Scheler's program of "informal ethical values" is well-known, and Hartmann himself emphasized this several times. What is decisive for both of them is, firstly, that existing moral values can be grasped by the subject and, secondly, that it amounts to a plurality of "values" that cannot be reduced to each other—such as, for example, justice, wisdom, courage, restraint, charity, truthfulness, sincerity, reliability, faithfulness, humility, modesty, courtesy, personality and love. Since Hartmann distinguishes ideal being from real being in his ontology, "the ontological foundation of [values] [shows itself] by the fact that the values themselves have an ideal being and are grasped in their way of being by the feeling of value" (Hartmann 1949, 461). Here, the human being occupies the key position in an ontologically understood ethics. First of all, the facticity of human history is also valid for ethics:

> The relativity of values, which becomes visible in the multiplicity of morals, is in truth only one of the feelings of value, whose openness to the individual groups of values, depending on what is prevailing at the time, can be very different. (Hartmann 1949, 463)

Even more serious, however, is that the human being can only realize values at all thanks to their fullness in respect of the strata:

> Since values . . . have no power of themselves to assert themselves in the real world, but are dependent on a real being, which has foreseeing, purpose, value consciousness, and freedom, the role of the mediator falls to the human being, who alone has these high gifts . . . The powerlessness of values is the condition of the human being's position of power. (Hartmann 1949, 463)

Thus, for Hartmann, one of the cornerstones of his anthropology-in-ethics is to show that "free will" is possible in the human subject alone: first of all, it alone is able—in respect of its stratification cutting across all such strata, from the inorganic to the spiritual—to encompass the causal nexus of the real world (including its own body) and direct it towards the goals set by the life-subject, where this is only possible because the world itself is not subject to a final nexus. And beyond this, the will of the life-subject

can not only have freedom with regard to the causal network of real events through its purposiveness, but also with regard to the ethical demand of the values of ideal being itself. In fact, it depends on the self-determination of the "personal spirit" whether, on balance, the human being casts its weight in favour of some value or not (Hartmann 1949, 463).

3. Conclusion

"Eccentric positionality" is a concept coined by Plessner. It is noteworthy, however, that its coinage would not have been possible without Hartmann. But the latter himself did not conceive of it, because, unlike Scheler and Plessner, his main focus was not primarily on philosophical anthropology, but rather on the ontology of being in the various strata, in their respective categories and, above all, in the elucidation of the categorial laws of the relation of the strata to each other. However, Hartmann, of course, had already in the mid-twenties immediately recognized and very well understood the goal of Philosophical Anthropology, which was to show the complicated relation between the strata in the concreteness of the human being. This was the case because Philosophical Anthropology refers to his ontology of non-spiritual and non-psychic dimensions of being—most clearly in the philosophical biology presupposed there. Thus, as Hartmann states in his later ontological reformulation of Philosophical Anthropology, "The human being does not stand on himself, but on a broad structure of interrelations of being, which are far from being his own, and also exist without him." (Hartmann 1955, 217) One can summarize the systematic theoretical relationship between the two approaches as follows: the middle Hartmann of the twenties, with his conception of a New Ontology (and especially in his discussion of Gehlen), was essential to making Philosophical Anthropology (e.g., Plessner's and Scheler's) possible as a theory. However, it also became clear to the later Hartmann from the 1940s onward that, *vice versa*, Philosophical Anthropology—as a paradigm case of the New Ontology—by showing the passage and modification of the categories, and the novelty of categories, in the most complex ontic phenomenon (i.e. the human being), simultaneously in this way identified the real epistemological condition in the cosmos. This is the quasi-concrete transcendental subject of the New Ontology, which can reflexively practice the New Ontology and partially penetrate the "structure of the real world."

Finally, let us address the affinity between the two theories as it relates to reflections on the status of philosophy amidst the other sciences. If one recognizes the theoretical-systematic relationship between the New Ontology and Philosophical Anthropology, then one will also recognize this

association as indicative of a new type of theory in the twentieth century, distinguished from other schools of thought such as the naturalism of, for example, the evolutionary-biological paradigm, phenomenology, philosophical hermeneutics, critical theory, and all constructivist approaches, especially of the social constructivist type. Scheler, Hartmann and Plessner each steer towards something like a reflexively modern theory. By this, we mean that ever since the rise of Cartesian dualism, two variants of modern philosophy have developed in constantly new ways. On the one side, we have an idealism, from the form of transcendental philosophy up to contemporary social constructivist approaches, wherein that which is given is always given according to the standard of cognitive or linguistic-discursive construction alone, On the other side of that dualism, meanwhile, modern thought develops as naturalism, from the varieties of materialism and empiricism to the all-pervading naturalism of the evolutionary biological elucidation of the solely human as well. Neo-Kantianism was already an idealistic reaction to the naturalism of the nineteenth century.

What the New Ontology and Philosophical Anthropology share is their breaking through to a reflexive modern theory that seeks to circumvent the radicalism of both of these dualistic directions. Hartmann, Scheler and Plessner did not wish to remain attached to idealism which, as expressed in neo-Kantianism and continued by social-constructivist approaches, is characterized by isolation from the factual. Again, conversely, they did not wish to surrender the claims of idealism in the face of the modern naturalistic turn of the nineteenth century, as occurred in the reductionist processes of thought not only of Darwin, but also Marx, Nietzsche and Freud. The distinctive accomplishment of the neo-ontological and philosophical-anthropological double paradigm is that it shows—and saves—the truth of modern idealism and constructionism in the midst of the truth of modern naturalism. Hartmann's realistic epistemology of the view from both sides of the subject-object relation, and his New Ontology of strata, became productive in the new Philosophical Anthropology of Scheler and Plessner, who implemented and further developed the core intuitions of Hartmann. In principle, the New Ontology and Philosophical Anthropology thus also coincide, in the functional determination of philosophy, as a form of knowledge. In both theories, philosophy cooperates with the different sciences as well as with common sense, and refers positively to their results while at the same time being indispensable as a separate form of knowledge, thus limiting the individual sciences in respect of their claims to validity. The sciences, which are each concerned with one stratum or one aspect of the world, cannot by themselves show the unity of multiplicity in its diversity.

The anti-monistic and anti-dualistic mode of thought of both the New Ontology and modern Philosophical Anthropology in the age of extremes and radicalisms was perfectly expressed in the mid-1950s by Plessner—already, so to speak, looking back at the productive years of the "Cologne constellation" (Fischer 2012; 2020; 2021)—when he once again formulated the theoretical ethos of Philosophical Anthropology in the terminology of an ontology of strata and "boundary research" between such strata:

> The reality of the human being [represents] the classical case for frontier research, in the double sense of the word: he is the object richest in dimensions that we know, and he is subject in all these dimensions and to them. Thus, he not only offers the most transitions from stratum to stratum, from substance to life, to soul, to spirit, but is, at the same time, superior to them as a person, as the core and carrier of this fullness of strata, and, to a certain extent, withdrawn from them. (Plessner 1983, 121)

If one reconstructs both of those theories in respect of their contemporary relevance in and of themselves and in terms of their elective affinity, taking into account the current state of interest and knowledge in the twenty-first century, then their epochal significance becomes visible. Thus, the "Cologne constellation" of the New Ontology and Philosophical Anthropology can be compared with other potential theoretical currents of German philosophy that developed in the turbulent 1920s and went on to successfully establish themselves, such as the Marburg constellation (Heidegger, Bultmann) alongside existential philosophy (developed in a productive manner, for example, through the differences between Heidegger and Jaspers, and later by Hannah Arendt), the Dilthey school (with Misch, Bollnow, König, and later Gadamer), the Frankfurt School of critical theory (Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse, Benjamin, etc.) (Wiggershaus 2010), and the Vienna Circle involving Carnap, Neurath and Wittgenstein, which developed logical positivism (Kraft 1957) and from which analytic philosophy developed in American exile under the influence, of course, of the English line (Moore, Russell, Broad, and others). One might perhaps say that the Cologne constellation, between 1920 and 1930, with its choice of theories at the intersection of the New Ontology and Philosophical Anthropology, was one of the most productive constellations of thought of this epoch, if one recognizes that alongside the ambitious young Plessner, Scheler and Hartmann, two philosophers belonging to it, were already recognized as philosophical forces. Further research could perhaps shed light on this extraordinary force-field in Cologne in order to compare the achievements

of this formation of thinkers with those in Marburg, Göttingen, Frankfurt, or Vienna at that time. (These are, presumably, the relevant equivalents in the history of the philosophy of the twentieth century.) And in this regard, the following assertion holds: whoever gives modern Philosophical Anthropology a new chance in the twenty-first century also creates a new opportunity for Hartmann's philosophy, with its valuable core theorems. The New Ontology and Philosophical Anthropology constitute an important theoretico-systematic association, and with this delineate their own "continent" within the German theoretical history of the twentieth century.

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