

Nicolai Hartmann's Interpretation of Hegel's Dialectics

Matteo Gargani

ABSTRACT This paper examines Nicolai Hartmann's interpretation of Hegel's dialectics, with particular attention to what he terms "real dialectics." It is divided into three sections. The first provides a concise account of Hartmann's reading of Hegel in its historical and historiographical context, emphasizing its independence from contemporaneous interpretations, such as those of Wilhelm Dilthey and Neo-Hegelianism. The second analyzes Hartmann's treatment of the relationship between Aristotle and Hegel—a key step toward understanding his conception of "real dialectics." Central here are the notions of the "concept" and the intellectual proximity between Aristotelian aporetics and Hegel's dialectical method. The final section develops Hartmann's account of Hegel's "real dialectics," examining its connection to the notion of *Erfahrung* and concluding with an evaluation of the elements Hartmann considers still philosophically relevant in Hegel's dialectical thought.

KEYWORDS aporetics; Aristotle; Hartmann, Nicolai; Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich; real dialectics

INTRODUCTION

This paper addresses the topic of Nicolai Hartmann's interpretation of Hegel's dialectics, with a special focus on what the former calls "real dialectics." The core of this lies in "Hegel und das Problem der Realdialektik" (Hartmann 1935), but the latter is not the only text in which Hartmann confronts Hegel. Traces of his analysis of Hegel's philosophy can already be found in his 1912 essay "Systematische Methode" (Hartmann 1912, 149, 160–2), while "Aristoteles und Hegel" (Hartmann 1923), published in the *Beiträge zur Philosophie des Deutschen Idealismus*, and the second volume of *Philosophie des deutschen Idealismus* (Hartmann 1929), which is devoted to Hegel, are both also fundamental to an understanding of the genesis of his interpretation of the latter's dialectics as "real dialectics." *Das Problem des geistigen Seins* (Hartmann 1933) is likewise important for a comparison with Hegel, given that it explicitly borrows from the latter's philosophy of Spirit, but we will not be concerned with it here.¹ The present paper is divided into (1) a concise presentation of Hartmann's interpretation of Hegel in terms of its historical context and main historiographical goals, (2) a focus on Hartmann's interpretation of the relationship between Aristotle and Hegel, this being a fundamental step towards grasping Hartmann's understanding of Hegel's "real dialectics," and (3) an account of what Hartmann considers to be Hegel's "real dialectics."

1. HARTMANN'S HEGEL

Nicolai Hartmann's engagement with the philosophy of Hegel, and more specifically with the *Science of Logic*, was not accidental. Hartmann was developing an interest in Hegel's *Science of Logic* at least as early as 1907. In December of that year, he wrote the following in a letter to his friend and future colleague Heinz Heimsoeth:

I have now turned all my power of thought to Hegelian logic, and inch by inch I wrestle with it. It is a book of inhuman difficulty. [Hermann] Cohen is simply concrete next to him.²

Two years prior to Hartmann's letter to Heimsoeth, Wilhelm Dilthey's celebrated study *Jugendgeschichte Hegels* (Dilthey 1905) was published. This

1. On Hartmann's interpretation of Hegel's "objective Spirit," see Jaeschke (2011). On the topic of "subjective Spirit," see Jaeschke (2012).

2. "Ich selbst habe meine ganze Denkkraft jetzt der Hegelschen Logik zugewandt und ringe mit ihr Fußbreit und Fußbreit. Das ist ein unmenschlich schweres Buch. Cohen ist einfach konkret neben ihm" (Hartmann and Heimsoeth 1978, 13).

investigation into Hegel's childhood, together with the subsequent release of manuscript fragments as part of the *Hegels theologische Jugendschriften* (Hegel 1907) edited by Herman Nohl, represent two fundamental contributions to the renaissance of Hegelian studies in the first three decades of the twentieth century, and not only in Germany. *Jugendgeschichte Hegels* sheds new light on the genesis of Hegel's philosophy by engaging with certain unedited documents from his juvenile phase. The collection edited by Nohl made Dilthey's sources fully available and expanded upon them, albeit according to philological criteria that had already been considered obsolete for many years (Schüler 1962). At the outset of the twentieth century, Dilthey and Nohl offered new philological and philosophical grounds for interacting with Hegel, indirectly placing the latter's intellectual physiognomy, together with his dialectics, at the centre of the philosophical discussion. Neo-Hegelianism benefited from this new focus. Moreover, commenting on the wide range of ideas behind this Hegelian revival, not all of which are strictly philosophical in nature, Wilhelm Windelband remarked: "Our young generation is gripped by a hunger for *Weltanschauung* and it looks to Hegel for satiation."³

In connection with the predominant contemporaneous historical-genetic direction of Hegelian research inaugurated by Dilthey's "fine *Jugendgeschichte Hegels*,"⁴ Hartmann appeared to remain somewhat unenthusiastic about the importance and innovativeness of the young Hegel's work. Despite the nearly four-hundred pages of the 1929 monograph *Hegel*, the pre-1801 fragments are simply listed in little over a page.⁵ Benedetto Croce's book *Ciò che è vivo e ciò che è morto della filosofia di Hegel* (*What is Living and What is Dead of the Philosophy of Hegel*) was published in German translation in 1909 (Croce 1909).⁶ Concerning the historical significance of the book, Karl Löwith stated that the

principle of the refurbishment of Hegel was first and most clearly determined by B. Croce through the distinction between a "dead" and a "living" portion of Hegelian philosophy.⁷

3. "Es ist der Hunger nach Weltanschauung, der unsere junge Generation ergriffen hat und der bei Hegel Sättigung sucht" (Windelband 1910, 6–7).

4. "in seiner schönen *Jugendgeschichte Hegels*" (Hartmann 1929, 62).

5. (Hartmann 1929, 62–64). On Hartmann's opinion of Dilthey's historiographic work, see Hartmann (1957, 8, footnote).

6. Concerning Croce's interpretation of Hegel, see Franchini (1963) and Bellamy (1984).

7. "Das Prinzip der Erneuerung Hegels ist zuerst und am deutlichsten von B. Croce festgelegt worden, durch die Unterscheidung eines 'toten' und 'lebendigen' Teiles der Hegelschen

Hartmann, who basically remained an outsider to Neo-Hegelianism as a cultural movement and theoretical field, just as he did with all philosophical schools of those years, declared that “I do not think that we find ourselves on the verge of a revival of Hegelian systematic thought.”⁸ This attitude did not, however, prevent him from having a long-lasting engagement with Hegel on key issues. In order to understand the link between Hartmann and Hegel, it is useful to refer to something Hartmann wrote in the first chapter of *Hegel*:

Not everything that Hegel taught and thought has survived the eternal test of truth of history. Not everything can guide the contemporary researcher. That there are also in Hegel “living and dead” elements (to cite the well-known slogan of Benedetto Croce, who understood the problem but did not find a way to overcome it) is, in the end, obvious.⁹

A substantial clue as to the type of engagement Hartmann aspired to have with Hegel is given in another passage from *Hegel*, the aim of which is to identify those elements in Hegel that are worth recovering and adapting to a new theoretical context:

Here, too, one can see that even the historian of spiritual objects understands his object only insofar as he understands factually and systematically that the problematic of the past discloses itself only to those who themselves have problems and pursue them, in short, that the historian of philosophy is, has always been, and will always be the only one who approaches the problem of his time theoretically. This changes the picture. The relationship “Hegel and us” shifts to another level. It is no longer a passive observation and admiration, but an evaluation. Indeed, one realizes that, strictly speaking, there is no purely contemplative understanding, that any non-evaluative view is a mistaken one, that one’s own exploration of the object is the only key to historical understanding.¹⁰

Philosophie” (Löwith 1969, 138).

8. “Ich glaube nicht, dass wir auf der Linie eines Wiederauflebens Hegelscher Systematik stehen” (Hartmann 1929, vi).

9. “Nicht alles, was Hegel gelehrt und gedacht, hat die ewige Wahrheitsprobe der Geschichte bestanden. Nicht alles kann dem heutigen Suchenden wegweisend sein. Dass es auch in Hegel ‘Lebendiges und Totes’ gebe—nach dem bekannten Schlagwort Benedetto Croce’s, der das Problem wohl sah, aber es zu meistern nicht die Kriterien fand,—ist im Grunde eine Selbstverständlichkeit” (Hartmann 1929, 10).

10. “Man begreift wieder, dass auch der Geschichtsforscher geistiger Dinge an seinem Gegenstände nur soviel versteht, als er überhaupt sachlich und systematisch versteht, dass die Problematik der Vergangenheit sich nur dem öffnet, der selbst Probleme hat und verfolgt,

Hartmann aims at freeing Hegel from what he considers to be lasting historiographical distortions. First, he calls for a deviation from the historiographically outdated image of Hegel as a continuation of the Kantian clash with the "old metaphysics"—i.e. as a philosopher to first and foremost be considered alongside Kant and Fichte (Hartmann 1923, 1–2). Second, for Hartmann, Hegel is primarily a "philosopher of the spirit; his thought was from the beginning theological, historical, sociological (the latter understood in the broad sense)."¹¹ Only from this viewpoint should the controversial Hegelian image of "Nature" as a form of the spirit's "being outside of itself" (Hartmann 1935, 2) be understood.

2. HARTMANN ON ARISTOTLE AND HEGEL

Hartmann's article "Aristoteles und Hegel" (1923) draws attention to an exegetical path of Hegelian philosophy that, according to Hartmann, had been unjustly neglected: namely, the relationship between Aristotle and Hegel. Indirect evidence of the relevance of the latter relationship can also be found in the extensive amount of historiographical scholarly research on the Aristotle-Hegel theme cited in due course below.¹²

In "Aristoteles und Hegel," Hartmann asserts (1) that the *Science of Logic* is the centre of Hegel's philosophy (Hartmann 1923, 2), (2) that only a clarification of Aristotle's role in Hegel allows one to fully disclose the meaning of the *Science of Logic* (Hartmann 1923, 2), and (3) that the "Doctrine of Essence" in the *Science of Logic* and the "central books" of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* constitute the "fundamental point of contact" between the two philosophers (Hartmann 1923, 22).

On the basis of a supposed Aristotelian concern for "saving the phenomena," Hartmann considers a strictly "empiricist" reading of the Greek philosopher misleading (Hartmann 1923, 3). At the same time, he asserts that the epagogic process is not, for Aristotle, a means of gaining knowledge of universals by way of comparison between individual entities. For Aristotle, in fact, the latter cannot be inferred empirically; it is already

kurz, dass der Historiker der Philosophie immer und in Ewigkeit nur der systematisch auf der Problemhöhe seiner Zeit Stehende ist. Damit verändert sich das Bild. Das Verhältnis 'Hegel und wir' rückt in eine andere Ebene. Nicht um passives Hinschauen und Bewundern handelt es sich mehr, sondern um Auswertung. Ja, man begreift, dass es streng genommen ein rein hinschauendes Verstehen gar nicht gibt, dass jedes nicht auswertende Sehen ein Vorbeisehen ist, dass das eigene Erschließen der Sache erst der Schlüssel zum geschichtlichen Verstehen ist" (Hartmann 1929, 10).

11. "Philosoph des Geistes; sein Denken war von den Anfängen her ein theologisches, historisches, soziologisches (letzteres im weiten Sinne verstanden)" (Hartmann 1935, 2).

12. For references pertinent to this issue, see Ferrarin (2004, 413–28).

present in various singularities: “thus in no way does perception give the individual thing as such, but only its universal.”¹³

Hartmann goes on to add that “Aristotle’s εἶδη [forms] are not Plato’s Ideas, they do not exist for themselves as χωριστά [separate entities]. They do, of course, express a ‘being in itself,’ but it is the being in itself of things. Hence the universal can always be found in the individual itself.”¹⁴ With this idea of the “concept” as “concrete” universal we can establish an important point of contact between Hegel’s *Science of Logic* and Aristotle:

The universal is thus the totality of the concept; it is what is concrete, is not empty but, on the contrary, has *content* by virtue of its concept—a content in which the universal does not just preserve itself but is rather the universal’s own, immanent to it (Hegel 2010, 532).¹⁵

For Aristotle and Hegel, the universality of the concept is not obtainable by abstraction, i.e. by adding together all predicates pertaining to a given subject, “but is rather the original that is already the basis of particularization.”¹⁶

According to Hartmann, there is a further significant similarity between Aristotle and Hegel: namely, aporetics. Regarding this, Hartmann states that “it in fact almost always leads to the discovery of internal contradictions. To use a modern expression, one could say that it leads to the antinomies.”¹⁷ Hartmann sees it at work, for example, in the Aristotelian definitions of “matter,” of “*eidos*,” and in particular of “motion”: “thus the fulfilment of the potentiality of being, insofar as it is such, is motion.”¹⁸

In the Aristotelian definition of *kinēsis* (motion) as an *energeia* (activity) between contraries, Hartmann sees a concept able to capture a real conflict,

13. “Empfindung also gibt gar nicht das Einzelding als solches, sondern nur sein Allgemeines” (Hartmann 1923, 4).

14. “Die εἶδη des Aristoteles sind nicht Platons Ideen, sie bestehen nicht für sich als χωριστά. Freilich drücken sie wie diese ein ‘Ansichsein’ (καθ’αυτό ὄν) aus. Aber es ist das Ansichsein der Dinge. Darum kann man das Allgemeine immer im Einzelnen selbst finden” (Hartmann 1923, 4).

15. On this issue, see Gérard (2012, 202).

16. “sondern das Ursprüngliche, das der Besonderung schon zugrunde liegt” (Hartmann 1929, 262).

17. “Sie führt nämlich fast immer zur Aufdeckung innerer Widersprüche. Mit einem modernen Ausdruck könnte man sagen, sie führt auf Antinomien hinaus” (Hartmann 1923, 6). On aporetics in Hartmann, see Martin (1952); Schlittmaier (2011); Rescher (2011).

18. “‘Die Vollendung des der Möglichkeit nach Seienden, sofern es ein solches ist, ist Bewegung.’ In dem ‘sofern’ liegt der Schwerpunkt” (Hartmann 1923, 7). What Hartmann translates as “Die Vollendung des der Möglichkeit nach Seienden, sofern es ein solches ist, ist Bewegung” is “ἡ τοῦ δυνάμει ὄντος ἐντελέχεια ἢ τοιοῦτον κίνησις ἐστίν” (*Phys.* 201a10–11).

thus representing a concrete example of “real dialectics”: “it is the greatness of Aristotle’s uncompromising aporetic consequence that he does not let himself be deterred by it, but that he rather fully accepts the antinomy, even includes it unresolved into the definition of motion itself. The apparently impossible is now revealed as the actual.”¹⁹ Hartmann’s interpretation must be broken down into at least two points.

First, he interprets Aristotelian aporetics as a specific method of analysis capable of identifying “contradictions” in definitions—of detecting specific antinomical moments within the concepts themselves. This aspect is, for Hartmann, largely maintained in Hegel:

The progress of dialectics over the conflict and its sublation in the following synthesis means nothing less for him [i.e., for Hegel] than the nullification of the conflict. The antinomies are considered authentic, the contradiction between thesis and antithesis as real and thoroughly indisputable.²⁰

Second, Hegelian dialectics as the exposition of “real contradictions” or “antinomies” is what Hartmann calls “real dialectics.” He finds the basis for the possibility of such dialectics in Aristotle:

Dialectical solutions consist in nothing but the acceptance of contradictions in real states of affairs. In this sense, one could say that Aristotle is, ultimately, a dialectician.²¹

In Hartmann’s reading of Aristotelian aporetics as a form of “real dialectics,” there is clearly a strongly interpretative, non-neutral character of which Hartmann does not seem unaware. First, the interpretation

19. “es ist die Größe der unbedingten aporetischen Konsequenz des Aristoteles, dass er sich dadurch nicht beirren lässt, sondern die Antinomie in vollem Maße gelten lässt, ja sie in die Definition der Bewegung selbst unbehoben aufnimmt. Das scheinbar Unmögliche erweist sich gerade als das Wirkliche” (Hartmann 1923, 7).

20. “Das Hinwegschreiten der Dialektik über den Widerstreit und dessen Aufhebung in der allemal auf dem Fuß folgenden Synthese bedeutet ihm nichts weniger als Vernichtung des Widerstreits. Die Antinomien sind als echte gemeint, der Widerspruch von These und Antithese gilt als real und durchaus unvernichtbar” (Hartmann 1929, 183).

21. “Dialektische Lösungen bestehen eben in nichts anderem als im Geltenlassen des Widerspruchs im realen Sachverhalt. In diesem Sinne darf man sagen, Aristoteles sei im Grunde Dialektiker” (Hartmann 1923, 9). See also: “Insofar as various aporetics and dialectics can be in themselves, that which results from them is, in principle, the same: the discovery and the positive evaluation of the antinomies.” (“Wie verschieden an sich auch Aporetik und Dialektik sein mögen, was sie ergeben, ist doch prinzipiell das Gleiche: die Aufdeckung und positive Würdigung der Antinomien”) (Hartmann 1923, 12).

of Aristotelian aporetics as a “method” is not unproblematic. Second, Hartmann’s interpretation that juxtaposes the Hegelian “contradiction” (*Widerspruch*) with the Aristotelian “contradiction” (ἀντίφασις) is controversial. The latter is, according to Aristotle, only one of the four forms of “opposition” presented in the *Categories*: i.e. the four forms in which “things are said to be opposed to one another” (Aristotle 1995, 57).²² In contrast, Hegel’s “*Widerspruch*” plays a role that goes far beyond the one assigned by the four forms of opposition in the *Categories*: in Hegel, the “*Widerspruch*” has a systematic character that has no analogy in Aristotle.

3. HARTMANN ON HEGEL’S REAL DIALECTICS

Nicolai Hartmann presented a paper with the title “Thought Dialectics and Real Dialectics” (*Denkdialektik und Realdialektik*) at the Hegelian Conference in Berlin (October 18th–21st, 1931). The conference was organized by the “International Hegel-Association” (*Internationaler Hegel-Bund*), founded on April 24th, 1930, with Richard Kroner as president and Julius Binder as vice-president, and was, together with the conferences in Haag (April 22nd–25th, 1930) and Rome (April 19th–23rd, 1933), the second of three international Hegel conferences.²³ As expressly stated by the editor Baltus Wigersma, Hartmann’s contribution does not appear in the conference proceedings:

Unfortunately, I was unable to publish the paper of Prof. Nicolai Hartmann, Berlin: “Denkdialektik und Realdialektik,” as it had already been accepted for publication by the *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*, appearing in the December 1931 issue. It was not even possible to obtain an excerpt of the talk from the speaker.²⁴

“Denkdialektik und Realdialektik” was published for the first time in French translation with the title “Hegel et le problème de la dialectique

22. “Λέγεται δὲ ἕτερον ἐτέρῳ ἀντικεισθαι” (Aristotle *Cat.* 11b17).

23. On the origin of the International Hegel-Association, see Wigersma (1932, 196–200). For the three international Hegel conferences, see Wigersma (1931; 1932; 1934).

24. “Leider war ich nicht imstande, den Vortrag von Prof. Nicolai Hartmann, Berlin: *Denkdialektik und Realdialektik* zu publizieren, da er bereits der Redaktion der *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* zur Veröffentlichung zugesagt war und dort im Dezemberheft 1931 erschienen ist. Auch ein Auszug seines Vortrages konnte mir vom Redner nicht zur Verfügung gestellt werden” (Wigersma 1932, v).

du réel" (Hartmann 1931a)²⁵ in a special issue of the *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* on Hegel, which also appeared in book format with the same papers under the title *Études sur Hegel* (Hartmann 1931b). And, less philosophical in nature, being largely commemorative, is Hartmann's "Hegel. Zum 100. Todestag am 14. November 1931," which was published in the newspaper *Die Vossische Zeitung* (Hartmann 1931c).

György Lukács attended the Hegelian Congress in 1931. Recalling the episode in a letter written on September 16th, 1952, to Wolfgang Harich, he says about Hartmann:

I listened to his talk at the Hegelian Conference of Berlin and I found in him a certain tendency towards the objectivity of reality. He was, as a result, heavily attacked by the Neo-Hegelians.²⁶

In an overall negative assessment within the context of a highly critical discussion on Neo-Hegelianism in *Die Zerstörung der Vernunft* (*The Destruction of Reason*, 1954), Lukács says:

The only modern thinker to take a positive stance towards dialectics, Nicolai Hartmann, mystifies it completely, turning it into an enigmatic godsent gift of genius.²⁷

However one may wish to interpret Lukács's statements, they attest to the originality of Hartmann's interpretation of Hegel.

Hartmann's ambition to isolate specific elements of rationality within Hegelian dialectics—particularly those regarding "correlation," "synthesis" as "superformation," and "antinomical conflicts" as indicators of real problems—naturally had an impact on his interpretation of the Hegelian "method." He maintained that dialectics is neither a method that can

25. Hermann Wein—a former student of Hartmann—centres his independent reinterpretation of Hegel around the question of "*Realdialektik*." He does not hide his intellectual debt to Hartmann, despite the presence of numerous critiques (Wein 1957, 182). Wein adds Wilhelm Sesemann to the group of philosophers working towards an elaboration of a "*Realdialektik*" in the early 1930s (Wein 1957, 18). See Sesemann (1935).

26. "Ich habe seinen Vortrag auf dem Hegel-Kongress in Berlin gehört und darin eine gewisse Tendenz zur Objektivität der Wirklichkeit wahrgenommen. Er wurde deshalb auch von den führenden Neuhegelianern scharf angegriffen" (Lukács and Harich 1997, 285). About this letter, see Tertulian (2003, 664–65).

27. "Der einzige moderne Philosoph, der positiv zur Dialektik steht, Nicolai Hartmann, mystifiziert sie vollständig, macht aus ihr eine rätselhafte Gottesgabe des Genies" (Lukács 1962, 498). Lukács is referring to Hartmann (1929, 18).

be prematurely applied nor something that can be reduced to a series of scholastic formulae.

Hartmann holds that, already in Plato's historical origins, dialectics is something that cannot be isolated from the "hypothetical method." While the latter obtains hypothetical principles from an analytical procedure, the "dialectical method" has the role of collecting the hypothetical principles obtained within a unitary system. In this way, dialectics becomes a further "instance of control" (*Kontrollinstanz*), the function of which is to confirm the validity of the single "principles" already obtained hypothetically:

In dialectics, the same principle is now integrated in a system of principles: this immediately yields a new criterion for its correctness, which arises from whether or not it [i.e., the principle] is compatible with the others. This instance of control is itself only a relation of reciprocity, namely such a [relation] between principles.²⁸

Not only the "hypothetical method," but also "deduction," "induction" and "analysis" are present in the historical tradition of dialectics. Thus, according to Hartmann, it comes as no surprise that, when Hegel is forced to confront his own methodological direction, he qualifies it as an *Erfahrung* (experience) (Hartmann 1935, 9).²⁹ Hartmann interprets the *Science of Logic* as a work built on a "descriptive" approach:

To deem the Hegelian dialectics a derivation is a grave error. If this were the case, descriptive zoology could be called a derivation. In contrast, the descriptive character of dialectics is indisputable.³⁰

28. "In der Dialektik nun wird dasselbe Prinzip eingegliedert in ein System von Prinzipien: sofort ergibt sich ein neues Kriterium seiner Richtigkeit daran, ob es sich mit den anderen verträgt oder nicht. Diese Kontrollinstanz ist zwar selbst nur eine Gegenseitigkeitsbeziehung, nämlich eine solche unter den Prinzipien" (Hartmann 1912, 144).

29. See also Hartmann (1931c, 5, column 2).

30. "Es ist das Falscheste des Falschen, Hegels Dialektik für Ableitung zu nehmen. Eben-
sogut könnte man die beschreibende Zoologie Ableitung nennen. Unverkennbar dagegen ist
der deskriptive Zug in der Dialektik" (Hartmann 1929, 167). See also: "the dialectics' dynamic
is not that of the thing. The categories march in opposite direction to those originating from
the essence of the absolute. And since the dialectics of the absolute is self-understanding and
self-consciousness of the absolute, it must be said that the being-for-itself of the absolute coin-
cides with its being-in-itself in the fullness of the whole, diverging only in the particular." ("Die
Dynamik der Dialektik ist nicht die der Sache. Die Kategorien marschieren in der umgekehrten
Folge auf wie die, in der sie aus dem Wesen des Absoluten folgen. Und da andererseits die
Dialektik des Absoluten das Sichselbstbegreifen oder das Selbstbewusstsein des Absoluten

Following the hermeneutic tradition of, most notably, Friedrich Adolf Trendelenburg, Hartmann seeks to understand the "true" subject of the *Science of Logic*. His view is that dialectics is not about the concepts of Being, Nothing, and Becoming, but about real determinations. In some ways, Hartmann goes farther in the interpretative path already opened up by Trendelenburg. In *Logische Untersuchungen*, Trendelenburg sought to refute the purity of the determinations of "Thought," "Being," and "Nothing" by way of a theory of motion as an implicit precondition for the dialectical process.³¹ Contrary to Trendelenburg, Hartmann does not perceive any surreptitious interpolations in the *Science of Logic*: he believes real determinations to be the true foundation of Hegelian thought.

Although the question cannot be fully addressed here, the descriptive and realistic interpretation of dialectics is visible in Hartmann's reading of the relation between "absolute," "world," and "reason"—three elements essential to Hegel's philosophy:

If, in fact, the absolute that shapes the world is reason, and if human reason in its highest stages (that is, in philosophical thought) is the self-consciousness of this world-reason, then there is no doubt that its self-unfolding and movement represent the self-unfolding and movement of the world.³²

If dialectics is the expression of the processuality of real determinations, then the "absolute," which Hegel identifies with "reason," coincides with the "self-deployment" process of these real determinations.

The major objection raised by Hartmann against Hegel's dialectics is that it violates the "universal law of knowledge." This law stipulates that "every train of thought, every consideration, moves from a presupposition that forms its starting point."³³ As a result of its own speculative premises, Hegelian dialectics cannot really move from any empirical "starting point." According to Hartmann, logic should always begin with a real

ist, so muss man sagen, dass das Fürsichsein des Absoluten sich mit seinem Ansichsein nur im großen Ganzen deckt, im Einzelnen aber auseinanderklafft") (Hartmann 1929, 195–96).

31. Trendelenburg (1840, 25–26). On this, see Beiser (2013, 62–63).

32. "Ist nämlich das Absolute, das sich in der Welt ausgestaltet, Vernunft, und ist ferner die menschliche Vernunft in ihren höchsten Stufen (also im philosophischen Denken) das Selbstbewusstsein dieser Weltvernunft, so kann es ja nicht fehlen, dass sie in ihrer Selbstentfaltung und Bewegung die Selbstentfaltung und Bewegung der Welt darstellt" (Hartmann 1935, 12).

33. "Man darf hier von dem allgemeinen Erkenntnisgesetz ausgehen, dass jeder Gedankengang, jede Überlegung von etwas Vorausgesetztem ausgeht, das den Ansatz bildet" (Hartmann 1935, 17).

presupposition, even in a hypothetical dialectical form. The same idea also applies to Hegel's *Science of Logic*:

If the starting point is real, a phenomenon, a given, something "experienced" must be at the basis of it, so one has reason to take the dialectical procedure as real and to grasp its curve as the object's mobile structure; if, instead, the starting point is not based on any demonstrable givenness, this itself is already a product of speculative thought and, hence, the dialectical procedure must be liable to the suspicion of being unreal.³⁴

In conformity with his "universal law of knowledge," Hartmann initiates a twofold criticism of "beginning" (*Anfang*) in the *Science of Logic*. First, he maintains that the absence of distinction between the determinations of "Being" and "Nothing" obtained at the onset of the "logic of being" in the *Science of Logic* (Hegel 2010, 59) is exactly that, but only on a conceptual level. Second, he maintains that Hegelian "Becoming" is without any ontological referent; by alluding to such "Becoming," Hegel is invoking the pure, pre-Eleatic becoming already refuted by Parmenides:

Even the supposed concept of becoming coincides in no way with the experienceable becoming. The presupposed concept is the old pre-Eleatic concept of becoming that affirms a rising from nothing and a disappearing into nothing. Parmenides' dictum already questioned this: *ex nihilo nil fit*. The only becoming we know from experience is fundamentally different: nothing ever arises from nothing, but always from something else, and nothing ever vanishes into nothing, but rather passes into something else that exists just as much. Nature is the great stream of this transition.³⁵

34. "Ist der Ansatz reell, liegt ihm ein Phänomen, ein Gegebenes und irgendwie 'Erfahrenes' zugrunde, so hat man Grund, den dialektischen Duktus auch als reell zu nehmen und seine Kurve als bewegliche Struktur des Gegenstandes aufzufassen; ist der Ansatz aber auf keinerlei nachweisbare Gegebenheit basiert, ist er selbst schon ein spekulatives Gedankenprodukt, so muss auch der dialektische Duktus im Verdacht stehen, ein unreeller zu sein" (Hartmann 1935, 18).

35. "Und selbst der supponierte Werdensbegriff entspricht in keiner Weise dem erfahrbaren Werden. Supponiert ist der alte voreleatische Werdensbegriff, der ein Entstehen aus Nichts und ein Vergehen in Nichts meinte. Gegen diesen richtete sich schon der Satz des Parmenides: *ex nihilo nil fit*. Das Werden, das allein wir aus der Erfahrung kennen, ist von Grund aus anders: da entsteht nie etwas aus Nichts, sondern stets aus etwas anders: da entsteht nie etwas aus Nichts, sondern stets aus etwas Anderem, und verschwindet nie etwas in Nichts, sondern geht in Anderes über, das ebenso seiend ist. Die Natur ist der große Fluss dieses Übergehens" (Hartmann 1935, 23–24).

According to Hartmann, dialectics as presented in the *Science of Logic* appears to be true in its immanent structure, but false in its formal guise: "This is immanently correct, but not transcendently true."³⁶ With this, he aims to show how, in the description of certain categorial dynamics, dialectics is also able to capture the nature of the real processes it intends to describe. Yet the formal guise (or "systematic" structure) in which Hegel intends to present such processes is false. At this point, it might make sense to ask: what does dialectics mirror? Hartmann's response is clear: "the emergence of contradiction in the development of a concept."³⁷

Hartmann considers Hegel's use of the term "contradiction" (*Widerspruch*) to be improper. For him, firstly, contradictions belong exclusively to the mental sphere, since they presuppose that a judgment is made: "Contradiction is something that in its essence belongs to the sphere of thoughts and concepts. Contradiction includes a 'diction,' and this logically implies a judgment."³⁸ Secondly, it thus follows for Hartmann that contradictions do not exist outside of the mental sphere: "Of course, concepts and judgments can contradict each other, because all the assertions in them are dynamic. But, strictly speaking, things, events, real relations cannot."³⁹ Thirdly, in line with his interpretation, Hegel does not adhere to the above-mentioned distinction, because he uses the term "contradiction" in an interchangeable way in reference to both judgments (proper use) and reality (improper use). Contrary to what Hartmann has established, for Hegel there are also "contradictions" between things, events and real relations. Hartmann states, fourthly, that what Hegel calls "contradiction" within reality is not truly such, but rather is an antinomy, a "conflict" (*Widerstreit*), a "real repugnancy" (*Realrepugnanz*):

Such conflict is a real repugnance; it can even assume the form of a dispute, or that of an open fight. But it shares no similarity with contradiction at all, as the elements in conflict never have the relation A to not-A, of a positive to a negative; instead it is always positive against positive. Expressed in logical

36. "Sie ist immanent richtig, aber nicht transzendent wahr" (Hartmann 1935, 24).

37. "das Auftauchen des Widerspruchs in der Entwicklung eines Begriffs" (Hartmann 1935, 25).

38. "Widerspruch ist etwas, was seinem Wesen nach der Gedanken- und Begriffssphäre angehört. Zum Widerspruch gehört der 'Spruch, Spruch,' und das will logischerweise sagen: das Urteil" (Hartmann 1935, 25).

39. "Begriffe und Urteile können sich freilich widersprechen, weil alle Aussage in ihnen sich bewegt. Aber Dinge, Geschehnisse, Realverhältnisse können es strenggenommen nicht" (Hartmann 1935, 25).

terms, the relation is that of contrariety rather than that of contradictoriness. The problem is only that the relation of contrariety is insufficient, as it does not convey the dynamic of the real repugnancy.⁴⁰

In Hegel, “actuality” (*Wirklichkeit*) does not coincide with mere “concrete existence” (*Existenz*), but rather with the “realization of an ideal element.”⁴¹ That which in Aristotle is presented as a teleology of the forms becomes, in Hegel, a teleology of the categories, of the “determinations of thought” (*Denkbestimmungen*). This teleology systematically violates that which Hartmann presents in *Der Aufbau der realen Welt* as content belonging to the “law of dependence,” which is at the same time “the fundamental categorial law”: “the lower categories are the strongest, the higher ones the weakest; thus, there is in the stratified structure only a dependence of the higher on the lower, not of the lower on the higher.”⁴² In Hegel, in fact, “it is not the elementary categories that dominate, but rather the complex, higher ones.”⁴³

The deductive side of the Hegelian *Science of Logic* is, however, merely apparent for Hartmann. In fact, the structure of that work is one of “ascension” rather than “deduction”:

it [i.e., dialectics] naturally leads to the higher, without deriving it from the lower. Derivation here is impossible: the richer and fuller can never “follow” from the poorer and more elementary, and Hegel never entertained the idea that this order of things could be reversed in the dialectical relation. If one

40. “Solcher Widerstreit ist Realrepugnanz; er kann auch direkt die Form des Konflikts, ja des offenen Kampfes haben. Aber mit dem Widerspruch hat er gar keine Ähnlichkeit, denn das Widerstrebende hat niemals das Verhältnis von A zu non-A, eines Positiven zu einem Negativen; immer steht da vielmehr Positives gegen Positives. Logisch ausgedrückt ist das Verhältnis eher konträr als kontradiktorisch; nur dass auch das konträre Gegensatzverhältnis nicht zureicht, weil es die Dynamik der Realrepugnanz nicht mit ausdrückt” (Hartmann 1935, 25–26).

41. “reale Vollendung eines Ideenhaften” (Hartmann 1923, 21).

42. “Die niederen Kategorien sind die stärkeren, die höheren die schwächeren; darum gibt es im Schichtenbau nur die Abhängigkeit der höheren von den niederen, nicht die der niederen von den höheren” (Hartmann 1949, 522). In *Aufbau der realen Welt*, Hartmann recognizes four “categorial laws” (*kategoriale Gesetze*): “validity” (*Geltung*), “coherence” (*Kohärenz*), “stratification” (*Schichtung*), and “dependence” (*Dependenz*). On the categorial laws, see Oberer (1966). On the question of the categorial laws as they relate to philosophical anthropology, see Wunsch (2012).

43. “nicht die elementaren Kategorien sind die beherrschenden, sondern die komplexen, höheren” (Hartmann 1923, 32). See also: “All teleology of forms—represented in numerous systems from Aristotle to Hegel—makes the mistake of inverting the law of strength. It makes the higher categories the stronger ones” (Hartmann 1953, 89–90, 97).

wanted to see a relation of dependence to be discovered in dialectics, then it would rather be the reverse: the lower always depends on the higher.⁴⁴

The *Science of Logic* is an ascensional process: only its formal guise is that of "deduction." The ascendant teleology of its categories is tainted by the speculative need to present the "representative form," namely the dialectic itself, as a deduction from the "Absolute." It is up to the interpreter, says Hartmann, to decide, case by case, considering each "determination of thought" in that work, what in it is alive and what dead.

Invoking the harmful consequences of "Neo-Hegelianism," Hartmann says that "the experiences of a century were thrown to the wind. What had long since begun to be distinguished, namely what is alive and what is dead in the Hegelian heritage of thought, was confused again, and an attempt was made to rebuild the great house of cards of his system and to settle in it."⁴⁵

With respect to Hegel, it is also necessary to distinguish what is "super-historical" (*übergeschichtlich*), i.e. what is "alive," what is philosophically valid, from what is merely "historical" (*geschichtlich*), i.e. the "dead," the fleeting elements of his philosophy:

It is important, however, to find the dividing line between "real" and "unreal" dialectics in his own thought, i.e. between those cases that are rightly claimed to be real dialectics and those that must be denied this status. In doing so, it should be clear from the outset that this would therewith also provide a criterion of what is permanent and what is transient in the Hegelian philosophy, a guideline for the extraction, in his spiritual legacy, of what is super-historical from what is merely historical and what has been overcome.⁴⁶

44. "So führt sie freilich auf das Höhere hin, aber sie leitet es nicht aus dem Niederen ab. Ableitung gerade ist hier ein Ding der Unmöglichkeit: das Reichere und Vollere kann niemals aus dem Ärmeren und Elementarerem 'folgen,' und niemals hat Hegel mit dem Gedanken gespielt, als könnte im dialektischen Verhältnis sich diese Ordnung der Dinge umkehren. Will man hier ein Abhängigkeitsverhältnis erblicken, das sich in der Dialektik aufdecken lässt, so ist es vielmehr das umgekehrte: immer hängt das Niedere am Höheren" (Hartmann 1935, 8).

45. "Man schlug die Erfahrungen eines Jahrhunderts in den Wind, vermengte wieder, was längst begonnen hatte sich zu scheiden, Lebendiges und Totes im Hegelschen Gedankengut, suchte das große Kartenhaus wieder aufzubauen und sich darin einzurichten" (Hartmann 1957, 41).

46. "Wichtig dagegen ist es, die Grenzscheide von 'reeller' und 'unreeller' Dialektik in seinem eigenen Denken aufzufinden, d.h. zwischen solcher, die den Anspruch Realdialektik zu sein, mit Recht erhebt, und solcher, der man ihn bestreiten muss. Wobei von vornherein einleuchten dürfte, dass eben damit auch ein Maßstab des Bleibenden und des Vergänglichen in der Hegelschen Philosophie gegeben wäre, eine Richtschnur zur Abhebung

According to Hartmann, the criterion of keeping only what is alive in Hegel's philosophy applies particularly to the latter's dialectics, precisely because this is the core of that thinker's philosophy (Hartmann 1957, 42). It is necessary to distinguish in Hegelian dialectics between what is philosophically valid and what is not. The former is the part of dialectics that expresses an actual "movement of the object," while the latter coincides with the philosophically obsolete side of dialectics as a mere "movement of thought," linked to "constructive" systemic demands (Hartmann 1957, 42–43).⁴⁷

In tackling Hegel's dialectics, Hartmann aims to adopt the fundamental distinction between "problem-oriented thinking" (*Problemdenken*) and "system-thinking" (*Systemdenken*) that he observes at work in the history of philosophy (Hartmann 1957, 3, 22). Although he classifies Hegel among the "system-thinkers" (*Systemdenker*) (Hartmann 1957, 3), he believes that the latter also brought about real philosophical progress with respect to specific points. The solutions of the "system-thinkers" with respect to particular problems can therefore interact with those offered by the "problem-oriented thinkers." "System-thinkers" often achieve real results in solving philosophical problems, but present them in a philosophical guise that ends up obscuring their importance.

Even the study of Hegelian dialectics must therefore be conducted in light of the fundamental contrast between "problem-oriented thinking" and "system-thinking" that animates the history of philosophy: "It is clear that even here a distinction must be made: a common thread of genuine knowledge and an element of speculative seduction intersect in dialectics."⁴⁸ Even in the case of dialectics, for Hartmann, *Problemdenken* serves as a compass for navigating through the history of philosophy in search of solutions to living problems.

des Übergeschichtlichen in seinem geistigen Erbe vom bloß Geschichtlichen und Überwundenen" (Hartmann 1935, 16).

47. The thesis that there are valid and invalid elements in Hegel's dialectics is not novel. Karl Marx, for instance, held the same view in *Das Kapital*. The goal of Marx's reading of Hegel was to find the "rational core" within the "mystic shell" of Hegelian dialectics, and thus to identify rational elements that can be used outside of the "mysticism" of Hegelian philosophy (Marx 1872, 822).

48. "Es liegt auf der Hand, dass es auch hier zu unterscheiden gilt: ein Leitfaden echter Erkenntnis und ein Element spekulativer Verführung überkreuzen sich in der Dialektik" (Hartmann 1957, 43).

REFERENCES

- Aristotle. *Categories*. In *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*, edited by Jonathan Barnes, translated by J.L. Ackrill. One-volume digital edition. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995.
- Beiser, Frederick C. 2013. *Late German Idealism. Trendelenburg and Lotze*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bellamy, Richard. 1984. "What is Living and What is Dead in Croce's Interpretation of Hegel." *Bulletin of the Hegel Society of Great Britain* 5 (1): 5–14.
- Croce, Benedetto. 1909. *Lebendiges und Totes in Hegels Philosophie, mit einer Hegel-Bibliographie*. Translated by K. Büchler. Heidelberg: C. Winter.
- Dilthey, Wilhelm. 1905. "Die Jugendgeschichte Hegels." *Abhandlungen der Preußischen Akademie der Wissenschaften. Phil.-hist. Klasse IV*: 1–212.
- Ferrarin, Alfredo. 2004. *Hegel and Aristotle*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Franchini, Raffaello. 1963. "Croce interprete di Hegel." *Atti dell'accademia pontaniana* 12: 1–28.
- Gérard, Gilbert. 2012. "Hegel, lecteur de la métaphysique d'Aristote. La substance en tant que sujet." *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* 74 (2): 195–223. <https://doi.org/10.3917/rmm.122.0195>.
- Hartmann, Frida, and Renate Heimsoeth, eds. 1978. *Nicolai Hartmann und Heinz Heimsoeth im Briefwechsel*. Bonn: Bouvier.
- Hartmann, Nicolai. 1912. "Systematische Methode." *Logos. Internationale Zeitschrift für Philosophie der Kultur* 3 (2): 121–63.
- Hartmann, Nicolai. 1923. "Aristoteles und Hegel." *Beiträge zur Philosophie des Deutschen Idealismus* 3: 1–36.
- Hartmann, Nicolai. 1929. *Die Philosophie des deutschen Idealismus*. Vol. II: *Hegel*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.
- Hartmann, Nicolai. 1931a. "Hegel et le problème de la dialectique du réel." Translated by R.-L. Klee. *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* 38 (3): 285–316.
- Hartmann, Nicolai. 1931b. "Hegel et le problème de la dialectique du réel." Translated by R.-L. Klee. In *Études sur Hegel*, 41–90. Paris: Armand Colin.
- Hartmann, Nicolai. 1931c. "Hegel: Zum 100. Todestag am 14. November 1931." *Vossische Zeitung*, November 13, 5–6.
- Hartmann, Nicolai. 1933. *Das Problem des geistigen Seins: Untersuchungen zur Grundlegung der Geschichtsphilosophie und der Geisteswissenschaften*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.
- Hartmann, Nicolai. 1935. "Hegel und das Problem der Realdialektik." *Blätter für deutsche Philosophie. Zeitschrift der Deutschen Philosophischen Gesellschaft* 9: 1–27.
- Hartmann, Nicolai. 1949. *Der Aufbau der realen Welt. Grundriss der allgemeinen Kategorienlehre*. Meisenheim am Glan: Westkulturverlag Anton Hain.
- Hartmann, Nicolai. 1953. *New Ways of Ontology*. Translated by Reinhard C. Kuhn. Chicago: Henry Regnery Company.
- Hartmann, Nicolai. 1957. "Der philosophische Gedanke und seine Geschichte." In *Kleinere Schriften*, vol. II, 1–48. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.
- Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. 1907. *Hegels theologische Jugendschriften*. Edited by Herman Nohl. Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr.
- Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. 2010. *The Science of Logic*. Translated by George di Giovanni. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Jaeschke, Walter. 2011. "Der Geist und sein Sein. Nicolai Hartmann auf Hegelschen Wegen." *Hegel-Studien. Beiheft* 55: 181–213.

- Jaeschke, Walter. 2012. "Über Personalität. Das Problem des Geistigen Seins." In *Von der Systemphilosophie zur systematischen Philosophie – Nicolai Hartmann*, edited by Gerald Hartung, Matthias Wunsch, and Claudius Strube, 241–58. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.
- Löwith, Karl. 1969. *Von Hegel zu Nietzsche. Der revolutionäre Bruch im Denken des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts*. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer.
- Lukács, Georg. 1962. *Georg Lukács Werke*. Vol. 9: *Die Zerstörung der Vernunft*. Neuwied am Rhein: Luchterhand.
- Lukács, Georg, and Wolfgang Harich. 1997. "Briefwechsel." *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie* 45 (2): 281–304.
- Martin, Gottfried. 1952. "Aporetik als philosophische Methode." In *Nicolai Hartmann. Der Denker und sein Werk*, edited by Heinz Heimsoeth and Robert Heiß, 249–55. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- Marx, Karl. 1872. *Das Kapital. Kritik der politischen Ökonomie. Erster Band*. Hamburg: Verlag von Otto Meissner.
- Oberer, Hariolf. 1966. "Über die Einheit der 'Kategorialen Gesetze': Zur Kategorienlehre Nicolai Hartmanns." *Kant-Studien* 57 (1–4): 286–95.
- Rescher, Nicholas. 2011. "Aporetics in Nicolai Hartmann and Beyond." In *The Philosophy of Nicolai Hartmann*, edited by Roberto Poli, Carlo Scognamiglio, Frédéric Tremblay, 53–72. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.
- Schlittmaier, Anton. 2011. "Nicolai Hartmann's Aporetics and Its Place in the History of Philosophy." In *The Philosophy of Nicolai Hartmann*, edited by Roberto Poli, Carlo Scognamiglio, and Frédéric Tremblay, 33–52. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.
- Schüler, Gisela. 1962. "Zur Chronologie von Hegels Jugendschriften." *Hegel-Studien* 2: 111–59.
- Sesemann, Wilhelm. 1935. "Zum Problem der Dialektik." *Blätter für deutsche Philosophie. Zeitschrift der Deutschen Philosophischen Gesellschaft* 9: 28–61.
- Tertulian, Nicolas. 2003. "Nicolai Hartmann et Georges Lukács. Une alliance féconde." *Archives de Philosophie* 66 (3): 663–98. <https://doi.org/10.3917/aphi.663.0663>.
- Trendelenburg, Friedrich Adolf. 1840. *Logische Untersuchungen*. 2 vols. Berlin: Bethge.
- Wein, Hermann. 1957. *Realdialektik. Von hegelscher Dialektik zu dialektischer Anthropologie*. München: Oldenbourg Verlag.
- Wigersma, Baltus, ed. 1931. *Verhandlungen des ersten Hegelkongresses vom 22. bis 25. April 1930 im Haag*. Tübingen-Haarlem: J. C. B. Mohr-Tjeenk Willink & Zoon.
- Wigersma, Baltus, ed. 1932. *Verhandlungen des zweiten Hegelkongresses vom 18. bis 21. Oktober 1931 in Berlin*. Tübingen-Haarlem: J. C. B. Mohr-Tjeenk Willink & Zoon.
- Wigersma, Baltus, ed. 1934. *Verhandlungen des dritten Hegelkongresses vom 19. bis 23. April 1933 in Rom*. Tübingen-Haarlem: J. C. B. Mohr-Tjeenk Willink & Zoon.
- Windelband, Wilhelm. 1910. *Die Erneuerung des Hegelianismus. Festrede in der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften*. Heidelberg: C. Winter's Universitätsbuchhandlung.
- Wunsch, Matthias. 2012. "Kategoriale Gesetze: Zur systematischen Bedeutung Nicolai Hartmanns für die moderne philosophische Anthropologie und die gegenwärtige Philosophie der Person." In *Von der Systemphilosophie zur systematischen Philosophie – Nicolai Hartmann*, edited by Gerald Hartung, Matthias Wunsch, and Claudius Strube, 153–69. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.