

Nicolai Hartmann's Concept of Critique*


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ABSTRACT This article explores Nicolai Hartmann's concept of "critique" (Kritik) and his critical method. The most important components of Hartmann's critical philosophy are the distinction between problem-thinking and system-thinking (problem-oriented and system-oriented thinking), the criterion of presupposition-lessness (neutral attitude, "this side" stance, which also highlights the priority of the phenomena over theory), the preference accorded to the natural attitude (toward the object) as opposed to the reflective attitude, the emphasis on the aporetic, the critique of the common philosophical methods, the critical review of Kant's philosophy, and lastly the theory of critical realism. Linked to the analysis of Hartmann's critical ontology, critical epistemology and critical metaphysics I also point out an uncritical concept in those. The discussion of the elements of Hartmann's critical methodology (transcendental, descriptive, and dialectical) shows that the various meanings of the concept of "critique" in Hartmann's philosophy converge in the methodology of aporetic phenomenology.

KEYWORDS aporetic; critique; Hartmann, Nicolai; Kant, Immanuel; presupposition-lessness; system-thinking; Tengelyi, László

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1. INTRODUCTION

In this article I discuss Nicolai Hartmann's concept of "critique" (*Kritik*) and his critical method, the so-called aporetic phenomenology.¹ The aim is to explore and develop the various aspects of critique in Hartmann's philosophy. The most important components of Hartmann's critical philosophy are the distinction between problem-thinking and system-thinking (problem-oriented and system-oriented thinking) (Hartmann 1931a, 283–340), the criterion of presuppositionlessness (*Voraussetzungslosigkeit*) (in the context of the latter distinction),² the preference accorded to the natural attitude (toward the object) as opposed to the reflective attitude (Hartmann 2019, 62–63), the emphasis on the aporetic, the critique of the common philosophical methods, the critical review of Kant's philosophy, and lastly the theory of critical realism.

Applying problem-oriented systematic thinking Hartmann distinguishes three methodological steps. The first step is the accurate description of phenomena. The second step is the identification and clarification of natural aporias, which Hartmann calls "aporetics." The last step is the formation of a theory, which is an attempt to solve aporias. This task is only an ideal, regulatory goal. It is important to note that this step in the research process involves a tendency towards system-construction. But this tendency should by no means involve the anticipation of a system. Hartmann sees the biggest mistake of the old systems in this neglect of the first two steps. On that account, the real structure of the world remains concealed from system-thinkers. All constructed systems have been refuted over time, while the results of problem-thinking prove to be useful and permanent.

In order to explain in more details what the concept of "critique" means for Hartmann, we first need to present a sketch of his conceptual framework.

1. This term was coined by László Tengelyi during the 2013 Spring Semester Doktoranden-Colloquium at the Bergische Universität Wuppertal, on July 1st 2013, after my presentation "Selbständigkeit in der Abhängigkeit – Nicolai Hartmanns Freiheitskonzeption."

2. "Presuppositionlessness" is here understood as a regulative idea, in the sense of neutral attitude, "this side" stance (*Diesseitigkeit*), *Standpunktslosigkeit*. Through the concept of presuppositionlessness the priority of the phenomena (over theory) is also emphasized. By criticizing the concept of "intentional objects," Hartmann uses the word "presupposition/basic presupposition" of objects in themselves, but notes that "it is not a constructed, but a general, unreflected, never first discussed presupposition that cognizing consciousness, insofar as it cognizes, or even only believes to cognize, has always already made. It is a presupposition that constitutes a basic feature of the phenomenon of cognition itself" ("zwar nicht eine konstruierte, sondern die allgemeine, unreflektierte, niemals erst diskutierte Voraussetzung, die das erkennende Bewusstsein, sofern es erkennt, oder auch nur zu erkennen glaubt, immer schon gemacht hat. Es ist eine Voraussetzung, die einen Grundzug schon am Phänomen der Erkenntnis selbst ausmacht") (Hartmann 1941, 121).

This framework begins with the distinction between system-thinking and problem-thinking and corresponds to the difference between natural and artificial aporias. This also clarifies what Hartmann means by “metaphysics” and “metaphysical problems.” The second section of my paper is concerned with the criterion of presuppositionlessness as well as with Hartmann’s realism and Scheler’s criticism of Hartmann’s philosophy. The third section deals with metaphysical problems with particular reference to critical concepts in the problem of knowledge. In connection to Hartmann’s conception of the irrational (*das Irrationale*),³ his concept of infinity seems to be uncritical. I handle this topic in the fourth section, along László Tengelyi’s criticism of this concept. In the final section, I discuss the elements of Hartmann’s critical methodology. In the course of the analysis, I show that the various meanings of the concept of “critique” in Hartmann’s philosophy converge in the methodology of aporetic phenomenology.

2. THE CRITIQUE OF SYSTEM-THINKING

Hartmann sees the main motive of system-thinking in the need for unity, which then leads to arbitrarily constructed systems. As constructions, these systems have to struggle with numerous internal conflicts, which are in fact artificial aporias. First, impatience can lead to speculative constructions, but the alleged solutions are usually speculative errors (Hartmann 1931a, 288). System-thinkers may confuse the content of the problem (*Problemgehalt*) with the formulation of the problem (*Problemstellung*) and misunderstand the objective meaning of metaphysical questions, believing that an unraised question does not exist. Second, they accept the idea that unsolvable problems are philosophically unfruitful (Hartmann 1931a, 288).

As a problem-thinker, Hartmann sees the contents of problems as perennial; the world gives us riddles that are eternal and unavoidable. He calls these riddles “natural aporias.” Natural aporias are the aporias of a *natural metaphysics*, which are independent of any system, worldview, and questioning (as well as indifferent to human knowledge). The only difference is in their discovery; philosophers from different eras discover different aporias (Hartmann 1931a, 289–90). Only in this sense can a certain range

3. Peterson translates Hartmann’s term “*das Irrationale*” with a more neutral term, “nonrational.” According to him, this is the proper solution if we want to “avoid unwanted negative connotations in English” (Peterson 2019b, XLII). I nevertheless prefer the translation “the irrational.” I find it unnecessary to try to avoid unwanted negative connotations in English, since the German term also has them. To avoid them, Hartmann gives a very clear definition of “*das Irrationale*” and clearly distinguishes it from the mystical irrational (*das mystisch Irrationale*) (Hartmann 1941, 232).

of possibilities be presented to the questioner. However, other factors condition these possibilities: *Zeitgeist*, worldview, and historical maturity (Hartmann 1931a, 290). By contrast, constructed systems produce mere artificial *aporias*, the basis of which is always a systemic prejudice. By abandoning this prejudice, the *aporias* disappear. A good example is the *aporia* of freewill in the monistic systems of materialism and finalism. Monistic theories such as these recognize only one kind of being and one mode of determination.⁴

The most important criterion of problem-thinking is that of presuppositionlessness. This criterion implies a return to a naive, everyday conception devoid of theory-building ambition. The problem-thinker thereby adopts a stance before (*Diesseitsstellung*) the realism-idealism distinction. This stance is a neutral attitude whereby neither hasty system-oriented generalizations nor premature conclusions should be made about the world. As Hartmann writes, “we make no premature decision about it at the start of the investigation” (Hartmann 2019, 52). But the neutral attitude towards being is only sustainable to a certain point. Once we have faced the task of interpreting the phenomenon of immanence, the “this side” stance is no longer sustainable and a decision has to be made.

We stand at the border of the “this side” stance. Our decision depends on the way we come to terms with the phenomenon of immanence. It may be further predicted that if this phenomenon of immanence is not reduced to a mere illusion, that is, if subjective idealism is correct, then all further effort in the field of ontology is pointless. (Hartmann 2019, 96)

Hartmann’s critique leads from the natural attitude (*intentio recta*) to ontology, or from a perspectiveless realism (understood neither as a theory nor as a system) to a critical realism. The naive, scientific, and ontological worldviews are—according to Hartmann—analogous and merge into each other continuously. The exact meaning of Hartmann’s realism, which is not an “ism” in the sense of a philosophical standpoint (Hartmann 1931a, 283), is based on the distinction between realism as a natural attitude and realism as a theoretical position. Realism as a theoretical standpoint has a derivative character and, more importantly, it has significant theoretical consequences right from the beginning. As Hartmann says, “in contrast to other forms of realism—and in contrast to other ‘standpoints’ in general—natural realism is not a theory, doctrine, or thesis, but the foundation

4. In a world like that, freedom is definitely impossible according to Hartmann. For a more detailed discussion of Hartmann’s concept of freedom, see: (Boros 2015).

upon which all human consciousness of the world is found to be built" (Hartmann 2019, 176). In this sense, we can consider Hartmann's realism as a realism without "ism,"⁵ even if something like a really neutral position (*Standpunktlosigkeit*)—as Adolf Seelbach reminds us—is never completely realizable (Seelbach 1933, 6).

The starting point is the naive world-consciousness, the natural realism of which includes two theses: the thesis of bare reality and the thesis of adequacy (in the sense of a correspondence between knowledge and reality). These two theses are denied by idealism. Hartmann's critical realism represents a middle way between (naive) realism and idealism inasmuch as it adheres to the reality-thesis, while rejecting the thesis of adequacy. Instead of the thesis of adequacy, Hartmann assumes a relation of overlap, which is merely partial and can never be complete. As he says in *Metaphysik der Erkenntnis*, "ontology connects that in which both [i.e., naive realism and idealism] are right . . . *It finds an ontological attitude in science*, which has already grown out of the infancy of naive consciousness and can take it as a starting point within certain limits."⁶

By analyzing relevant phenomena (the first stage of systematic thinking), Hartmann develops arguments for a realist position. First, he examines the primary transcendent acts (i.e., emotional transcendent acts) (*emotional transzendente Akte*), which are characterized by the immediacy of the experience of reality (*Unmittelbarkeit des Realitätserlebnisses*). These acts "are transcendent insofar as they depend on the ontically independent counterpart; they are emotional insofar as the emotional tone in them is an essential and actual bearer of the certificate of reality."⁷

As a secondary act, the act of cognition is based on these primary acts and plays a merely subordinate role in the life context (*Lebenszusammenhang*). Hartmann writes: "The 'objects' [*Gegenstände*] first of all are not something that we know, but something that 'concerns' us practically, something that

5. Some authors question Hartmann's neutral attitude, which claims to provide a starting point for ontology before the realism-idealism opposition. For example, Martin Morgenstern recognizes in it a tendency towards a presupposed realist interpretation, from which a whole series of ontological, epistemological, and metaphysical consequences follow (Morgenstern 1992, 35).

6. "Die Ontologie verbindet das, worin beide recht haben. . . . *Sie findet in der Wissenschaft eine ontologische Einstellung vor, welche die Kinderschuhe des naiven Bewußtseins bereits abgestreift hat, und kann sie in gewissen Grenzen zum Ausgangspunkt nehmen.*" (Hartmann 1941, 182)

7. "Transzendent sind sie, insofern sie am ontisch selbständigen Gegengliede hängen; emotional sind sie, insofern der Gefühlston in ihnen wesentlicher und eigentlicher Träger des Realitätszeugnisses ist." (Hartmann 1931b, 15–16)

we have to ‘face’ in life and ‘grapple’ with; something with which we have ‘to deal,’ that we have to utilize, overcome, or endure” (Hartmann 2019, 201).

The emotionally experienced world and the known world fit into the same life context (*Lebenszusammenhang*), into the *only* real world that can be experienced in two ways. Hartmann summarizes this relationship as follows (translation modified):

if on the whole it is the same real world that in both contexts constitutes our object, then obviously the emotional givenness of reality [*emotionale Realitätsgegebenheit*] is transferred to the objects of cognition [*Erkenntnisgegenstände*]. Emotional experience and objective cognition are and shall remain fundamentally different of course, but the objects of such experiences are at the same time objects of possible cognition nevertheless. (Hartmann 2019, 235–36)

When it comes to objectivity, content structure, overview, and *Sosein* (suchness), knowledge has the advantage. But the certainty of reality, of *Dasein* (existence), depends on emotional givenness.

Max Scheler vehemently opposes both critical realism and consciousness-idealism (*Bewusstseinsidealismus*). Elaborating a third position, he comes to deny the basic thesis of the inseparability of *Dasein* (reality) and *Sosein* (suchness). The initial thesis of the critical realists is that the existence (*Dasein*) of an object is essentially transcendent, i.e., that it cannot become a content of consciousness. But, if we also accept this thesis for the *Sosein*, it follows that *Sosein* can only be represented in consciousness by a suggestive image (*hindeutendes Bild*) or symbol. Scheler is not ready to accept the representational theory (*Abbildtheorie*). However, he recognizes that the denial of the representational theory, together with the thesis of the inseparability of the existential moments (*Dasein* and *Sosein*) must inevitably lead to the consciousness-idealist conclusion that there is no consciousness-transcendent *Dasein*. Scheler opens a third way by separating *Dasein* and *Sosein* in relation to their consciousness-immanence (*Bewusstseinsimmanenz*) and claims that the *Sosein* of an object can be immanent to consciousness, but that its *Dasein* is necessarily transcendent (Scheler 1927, 185–86) and can merely be “given.”

Scheler’s third way completely contradicts Hartmann’s conception according to which not only is the connection between *Dasein* and *Sosein* inseparable but which also attributes to them a so-called “progressively offset identity” (*fortlaufend verschobene Identität*) (Hartmann 2019, 146).

Every *Sosein* of something “is” itself also the *Dasein* of something, and every *Dasein* of something “is” also the *Sosein* of something. It is just that the

“something” is here not one and the same thing. The *Dasein* of the tree in its place “is” itself a *Sosein* of the forest, and the forest would be different without it; the *Dasein* of the branch of the tree “is” a *Sosein* of the tree; the *Dasein* of the leaf on the branch “is” a *Sosein* of the branch; the *Dasein* of the vein in the leaf “is” a *Sosein* of the leaf. (Hartmann 2019, 146)⁸

Hartmann advocates an attitude based on the Copernican counter-revolution. This attitude, which stems from natural realism⁹, implies that the cognitive relation is interpreted as a relation of being (*Seinsverhältnis*) and the cognitive act as a transcendent act. He describes Kantian philosophy as uncritical because of its reflective (epistemological) attitude (*intentio obliqua*).

The ontological transformation of the idealistic immanence of thought in being into an immanence of being in thought means the reversal of Kant's ‘Copernican act’ . . . The ontological reversal re-establishes the Copernican analogy; it integrates reason into a larger system of being that does not orientate and move according to it, but in which it itself is the dependent and secondary . . . The general scheme of this new revolution, which . . . signifies a return to the natural attitude, is the formula of the immanence of thought in being.¹⁰

In his paper “Diesseits von Idealismus und Realismus,” he seeks the eminently critical concept in Kant's philosophy and undertakes to discard the systemic, temporary elements of Kantian philosophy and disconnect the main idea of the Kantian position from the system of transcendental idealism (Hartmann 1924). Hartmann's critical attitude is based on the dissociation of problem-oriented and system-oriented thinking.

8. Hartmann criticizes Scheler's point of view by emphasizing the distinction between moments of being (*Dasein* and *Sosein*), modes of being (reality and ideality) and their relation to the stems of knowledge. Reality is characterized by temporality, variability and individuality, whereas ideality is characterized by timelessness, immutability and universality. A certain neutrality with regard to the mode of being is added to *Sosein*, since it is not yet clear from the *Sosein* of an object whether it has ideal or real *Dasein*. In view of the mode of being, existence becomes decisive. Ideal *Dasein* and *Sosein* are only recognizable a priori, real *Sosein* both as a priori and as a posteriori, but real *Dasein* only a posteriori (Hartmann 2019, 146ff).

9. More to the topic of Hartmann's realism and the recent realist projects (Graham Harman, Maurizio Ferraris) see: (Boros 2019).

10. “Die ontologische Umprägung der idealistischen Denkimmanenz des Seins in eine Seinsimmanenz des Denkens bedeutet die Umkehrung der »kopernikanischen Tat« Kants. . . . Die ontologische Umkehrung stellt die Analogie mit der kopernikanischen wieder her; sie gliedert die Vernunft in ein größeres Seinssystem ein, das sich nicht nach ihr richtet und bewegt, in welchem sie vielmehr selbst das Abhängige und Sekundäre ist. . . . Das allgemeine Schema dieser neuen Revolution, die . . . eine Rückkehr zur natürlichen Einstellung bedeutet, ist die Formel der Immanenz des Denkens im Sein” (Hartmann 1941, 276–77)

Max Scheler criticizes Hartmann's realistic concept of the thing in itself and the elimination of transcendental apperception, because he sees it as a relapse into a pre-critical reality-dogmatism (*vorkritischer Realitätsdogmatismus*) (Scheler 1927, 292–93).¹¹ Hartmann interprets the realist conception of the thing in itself as Kant's original, problem-oriented position, and understands Kant's highest principle as an epistemologically neutral thesis. According to Hartmann: "it is impossible to exploit Kant's philosophy as long as one sees his work as constricted in the straitjacket of a historical point of view (even if it is his own point of view)."¹² In this sense, the most important criterion for evaluating a theory is whether it can solve a whole range of aporias without creating new ones. For example, transcendental idealism performs very well in its treatment of the *aporia* of knowledge (Hartmann 1941, 148). These results are due to the timeless elements of the theory, which must be strictly dissociated from its standpoint-conditioned elements.

3. CRITICAL ONTOLOGY, CRITICAL EPISTEMOLOGY, AND CRITICAL METAPHYSICS

Just as Kant is opposed to dogmatism and non-critical metaphysics, Hartmann is opposed to Neo-Kantian non-metaphysical criticism and wants to establish a critical metaphysics. He characterizes his starting point as an awakening from the critical slumber (Hartmann 1924, 160–61). In the Kantian sense, metaphysics is not a philosophical discipline and, for Hartmann, this definition is useless insofar as the "old metaphysics was a discipline delimited in terms of its content; God, the soul, and the cosmos were its objects" (Hartmann 2019, 36).

Another option would be to understand metaphysics as the battleground of various speculative systems, whereby contradictory solutions to the problems would emerge (depending on different prejudices). It is obvious that Hartmann cannot and does not want to do anything with this option, because he considers system-thinking—with its artificial aporias and contradictions—philosophically unproductive and superfluous. On this view, system-thinking deserves neither the name of metaphysical nor of philosophical thought.

11. For more on Hartmann's and Scheler's ontological realism with regards to the objectivity of values, see: (Tremblay 2019, 193–232).

12. "es ist unmöglich Kant auszuschöpfen, solange man sein Werk in die Zwangsjacke eines geschichtlichen Standpunktes (und sei es auch seines eigenen Standpunktes) eingeschnürt sieht" (Hartmann 1924, 162).

True metaphysics, according to Hartmann, can only be a metaphysics of problems. Natural aporias are *per definitionem* metaphysical problems, because, by attempting to solve them, we reach the limit of the cognizable. They contain an unsolvable residue (*unlösbarer Rest*). Hartmann's definition of metaphysical problems is as follows:

Such problems, unavoidable and undeniable, are the genuine and legitimate metaphysical problems. In this sense, they constitute the background of domains of inquiry because they provide us with a firm connection to the cognizable, but are also ultimately insoluble by way of our limited cognitive means and therefore continue to exist despite all cognitive progress. (Hartmann 2019, 37)

Such unsolvable problems can be found in all areas, in the background of what is cognizable. This applies especially to the fundamental questions of philosophy. And the treatment of these problems requires the practice of metaphysics. Metaphysics thereby proves to be indispensable insofar as we sooner or later encounter metaphysical problems in various contexts. An important critical principle in Hartmann's conception is that of the "minimum of metaphysics." This is a principle of parsimony that stipulates that, by going beyond the limit of the necessary minimum, we tend to end up with unverifiable statements (Hartmann 1941, 8; 129). In this sense, how we treat the irrational residue of the metaphysical problem is crucial. If the irrational residue of the problem is cognized, it should be delimited and its place among cognizable entities should be determined. Hartmann considers any other way of treating metaphysical problems as mere speculation.

It is important to note that this irresolvable irrational (*unaufhebbare Irrationalität*) is not irrational in itself, but only for us. The irrational in itself could not be objectified as such. An unknowable could not even be delimited; there is irrationality only because human objectification is limited. The irrational indicates the limits of rational knowledge. Hartmann's metaphysics thus gives the irrational a positive meaning, insofar as it understands it as the limiting concept of the knowable. As he says, the "irrational always appears only as the infinite perspective of the rational, which gradually fades in a certain direction."¹³ The irrational is an "expression

13. "Das Irrationale erscheint immer nur als die ins Unendliche verlaufende Perspektive des in bestimmter Blickrichtung stufenweise verblassenden Rationalen" (Hartmann 1941, 273).

for being in general, insofar as it does not fall within the limits of what is cognizable.”¹⁴

Hartmann defines the relation of cognition as a relation of being (*Seinsverhältnis*), as a relation between the subject and the object, which is indifferent to being known.

Cognition, understood as an act . . . is not reducible to an act of consciousness [*Bewußtseinsakt*]; it is a transcendent act . . . If consciousness were not capable of any transcendent acts, it could know nothing about the being of the world in which it lives. It would be imprisoned in its immanence, and could know nothing other than its own products, its thoughts or representations [*Vorstellungen*]. Skepticism has made this claim since antiquity . . . One can think everything possible, even that which does not exist; but we can only cognize what “is.” (Hartmann 2019, 173)

A key concept in Hartmann’s critique of knowledge (*Erkenntniskritik*) is the concept of *Ebendenbarkeit* (near thinkability), from which the concept of the minimum of rationality (and the maximum of irrationality) can be derived. The concept of *Ebendenbarkeit* gives the concept of the irrational a positive meaning: it denotes the object inasmuch as it remains unrecognized (Hartmann 1941, 276).

The progress of knowledge is based on the fact that being and thinking are only partially identical. Accordingly, the sphere of the knowable is situated between two irrationalities, namely, between the irrational moments of the principles and the partial irrationality of the objects (Hartmann 1941, 294). As Hartmann writes in “Über die Erkennbarkeit des Apriorischen”:

Because both the objects and the principles become unknowable at a certain level. On both sides, this unknowability does not mean absolute transcendence, not total detachment, total lack of relations with the knowable. Rather, relations permeate throughout; and it is precisely because they exist that there can be a philosophical awareness of the irrational at all.¹⁵

14. “Ausdruck für das Seiende überhaupt, sofern es in den Grenzen des Erkennbaren nicht aufgeht” (Hartmann 1941, 9).

15. “Denn sowohl die Gegenstände als die Prinzipien werden von einem gewissen Niveau ab unerkennbar. Auf beiden Seiten bedeutet diese Unerkennbarkeit nicht absolute Transzendenz, nicht totale Abgelöstheit, totales Fehlen der Beziehungen zum Erkennbaren. Beziehungen walten vielmehr durchgehend; und nur weil sie vorhanden sind . . . kann es überhaupt ein philosophisches Bewußtsein des Irrationalen geben.” (Hartmann 1914/15, 327)

The limit of the possible objectification of the object divides it into two parts: a finite, objectified part and an infinite, transobjective *residuum*. The unity of the phenomenon of knowledge (*Erkenntnisphänomen*) means that there is no split between the irrational and the rational (appearing) part of the object, that the phenomenon and being-in-itself merge continuously. Knowledge always tends towards comprehension of the whole object, including its infinite transobjective part. The objectified, knowable part of the object is merely a finite section; the object is indicative of an inexhaustible totality, an infinity.

4. LÁSZLÓ TENGELYI'S CRITICISM OF HARTMANN'S CONCEPT OF INFINITY

In this context, we must point out that there is also, in Hartmann's philosophy, a concept that appears to be uncritical. Hartmann's concept of infinity is not clearly elaborated. It thus remains, according to László Tengelyi, an uncritical, inconsistent concept. In his critique, Tengelyi thoroughly analyses Hartmann's understanding of the idea of the existence of an infinite object (Tengelyi 2014a, 665). The concept of irrationality plays a central role in Hartmann's critical philosophy. In contrast, his concept of the infinite is peripheral and has received considerably less attention from later scholars.

According to Tengelyi's interpretation, Hartmann understands the infinite object as a "closed totality of all determinations" (Tengelyi 2014a, 670). Tengelyi suggests that this corresponds to what in Cantor's set theory is called an "inconsistent multiplicity" (*inkonsistente Vielheit*) (Cantor 1962, 443), since "all the determinations cannot even be united in an actual-infinite object free of contradictions into an absolute totality or into an unconditioned whole."¹⁶

Tengelyi advocates for another—non-contradictory—conception of infinity, for an actual, open infinity. Such a conception can be found in Husserl:

But does each thing . . . have such an essence of its own [*Eigenwesen*] in the first place? Or is the thing, as it were, always underway, not at all graspable therefore in pure Objectivity, but rather, in virtue of its relation to subjectivity, in principle only a relatively identical something, which does not have its essence in advance or graspable [*erfaßbares*] once and for all, but instead has an open essence, one that can always take on new properties according to the constitutive circumstances of givenness [*Gegebenheit*]? (Husserl 1989, 312–13)

16. "alle Bestimmtheiten nicht einmal in einem aktual-unendlichen Gegenstand widerspruchsfrei zu einer absoluten Totalität oder zu einem unbedingten Ganzen vereinigt werden können" (Tengelyi 2014a, 667).

This passage contains, according to Tengelyi, a double insight. On the one hand, the individual things in the world have an open nature; they can always take on new properties. On the other hand, nature cannot be a self-contained totality, a homogenous, self-sufficient whole. Nature is just part of an overall world (*Gesamtwelt*), which is itself characterized by open infinity (Tengelyi 2014b, 430–31). This openness (*Offenheit*) is problematic for scientific objectivity, because “the world, to which things belong, can no longer be conceived as a self-contained and self-sufficient nature.”¹⁷ In Husserl’s interpretation, the infinity of the world is not a transfinite infinity, but indicates an openness (Tengelyi 2014b, 544).

On the basis of Tengelyi’s critique of Hartmann, I have shown elsewhere that Hartmann’s understanding of infinity (understood as an actual and closed infinity) is halfway between Kant’s (potential) and Husserl’s (*actual* and *open*) concepts of infinity (Boros 2017). Here, however, I would like to briefly point out the possibility of a different interpretation.

Although Hartmann did not himself address the contradiction emphasized by Tengelyi, he nevertheless touches upon the idea of the *openness* of infinity in at least two passages in his works. The first is in *Metaphysik der Erkenntnis*: “The totality of the object proves to be an actual infinity that the finite mind is unable to encompass. Or, to use a different image, the avenues of problems that are being followed *do not converge*, the overall picture is not simplified, it is becoming ever broader.”¹⁸ The second passage is from the essay “How is Critical Ontology Possible?": “It is evident that every additional domain of differently structured principles, provided there are any, is to be integrated in the same way. That is, the task of *philosophia prima* is an unfinished circle, a *pros hemas* [for us] open totality of overlapping, partial tasks” (Hartmann 2012, 322). These two passages seem to contradict the conception of the infinite object as a “*closed* totality of all determinations” and to point towards a conception of infinity as actual and open.

5. ELEMENTS OF A CRITICAL METHODOLOGY

In his early work “Systematische Methode” (1912), Hartmann develops his critically-oriented methodological considerations, which will later become

17. “kann die Welt, zu der die Dinge gehören, nicht mehr als eine in sich geschlossene und selbstgenügsame Natur aufgefasst werden.” (Tengelyi 2014b, 544)

18. “Die Totalität des Gegenstandes erweist sich als aktuelle Unendlichkeit, die zu durchlaufen dem endlichen Verstande unmöglich ist. Oder, um ein anderes Bild zu brauchen, die Problemlinien, die man verfolgt, *konvergieren nicht*, das Gesamtbild vereinfacht sich nicht, es geht immer mehr in die Breite.” (Hartmann 1941, 235; my italics)

fundamental for his research on categories (Hartmann 1912). He assumes that the Kantian (or the Neo-Kantian) transcendental method alone is insufficient and that it must be complemented by Husserl's descriptive phenomenological method and by Hegel's dialectical method. Thus, Hartmann does not only plead for the flexibility of methods, but also against logical idealism's claim to systematicity.¹⁹

The task of the transcendental method is to deduce the principles of the object (thing). As he says, the "transcendental method is . . . the procedure by which, starting from the actuality of the object, the conditions of its possibility are opened up."²⁰ Hartmann complements this method with the descriptive method, the task of which is to describe objects. Based on the combination of methods, Hartmann interprets the given (*das Gegebene*) as a mixture of perception and thinking (*Mixtum von Empfindung und Denken*) (Hartmann 1912, 136). This complex of methods becomes complete with the dialectical (purely logical) method, which adds the idea of the interdependence of the principles to it. This combination also implies a critical limitation of dialectics as a method, because "in individual cases, dialectics is only evident in its conclusions, but not as a special logical procedure. It forms the over-scientific, because over-empirical, character of philosophy."²¹

Hartmann applies this threefold methodology to his theory of categories. This tripartition overlaps with the three methodological steps of philosophical research (in the metaphysics of knowledge): phenomenology, aporetics, and theory. The various aspects of critique in Hartmann's philosophy culminate in the methodology of aporetic phenomenology.

For Hartmann, the first methodological step (phenomenology) corresponds, in a certain sense, to the field of Husserlian phenomenology (i.e., an accurate description of all that is "given").²² It also coincides with the descriptive method of research on categories.²³ Phenomenology is, however,

19. On Hartmann and the transcendental method, see: (Morgenstern 2013; Pietras 2021).

20. "Und transzendente Methode ist dann dasjenige Verfahren, nach welchem man, von der Wirklichkeit des Gegenstandes ausgehend, die Bedingungen seiner Möglichkeit erschließt." (Hartmann 1912, 125)

21. "Dialektik ist am Einzelfall nur inhaltlich einleuchtend in ihren Schlüssen, nicht aber als besonderes logisches Verfahren beweisbar. Sie macht den überwissenschaftlichen, weil überempirischen Charakter der Philosophie aus" (Hartmann 1912, 163).

22. "This approach has the great advantage that it places the researcher directly in front of the thing . . . and not in front of concepts, definitions, judgements." ("Dieses Vorgehen hat den großen Vorzug, daß es den Forscher unmittelbar vor die Sache stellt . . . und nicht vor Begriffe, Definitionen, Urteile.") (Hartmann 1958, 367; Quoted by Möckel 2012, 113)

23. As Morgenstern summarizes: "Categories are the unconsciously functioning moments in cognition, whereas concepts are the conscious fixation of these categories. Concepts are

merely a preparatory phase for Hartmann insofar as the research cannot stop at the mere description of phenomena.²⁴ Phenomenology as the first stage is not understood here merely chronologically, but also in the sense that phenomena weigh heavier than theory.²⁵ Especially characteristic of Hartmann's critical approach is the second step, the so-called aporetics, which (after the precise description of the phenomena in the first step) is practiced as the proper formulation of problems and clarification of natural aporias. The latter lie in the phenomena themselves and are as such essentially insolvable. As has been explained earlier, attempts to solve the aporias only come at the last step of philosophical research, namely, the step of theory.²⁶ A tendency towards system-building emerges only at this step.

Georg Lukács accused Hartmann of treating dialectical states of affairs merely as aporias, even though dialectical problems require dialectical solutions. Lukács interprets Hartmann's methodology as a return to Aristotelian dialectics and the application of the aporetic method as an evasion

thus, as it were, hypotheses about the categories actually working in cognition." ("Kategorien sind die unbewusst funktionierenden Momente in der Erkenntnis, wohingegen die Begriffe die bewusste Fixierung dieser Kategorien sind. Begriffe sind somit gleichsam Hypothesen über die tatsächlich im Erkennen arbeitenden Kategorien") (Morgenstern 2013).

Hartmann says: "The descriptive method operates with principles whose logical essence it does not recognise, indeed whose existence it does not even know. It is the type of such a method that does not see through its own conditions. It is a knowledge through principles, but not a knowledge of principles, like the transcendental method, but only a one-sided knowledge of objects. It is not a critical but a naïve method." ("deskriptive Methode mit Prinzipien operiert, deren logisches Wesen sie nicht erkennt, ja um deren Vorhandensein sie nicht einmal weiß. Sie ist der Typus einer solchen Methode, die ihre eigenen Bedingungen nicht durchschaut. Sie ist eine Erkenntnis durch Prinzipien, aber keine Prinzipienkenntnis, wie die transzendente Methode, sondern nur einseitig Gegenstandserkenntnis. Sie ist eben nicht kritische, sondern naive Methode") (Hartmann 1912, 138f).

24. The differences between Hartmann's and Husserl's phenomenology are fundamental. About "phenomenological essences," (see Hartmann 2019, 139–140); or, about "intentional objects," (Hartmann 1941, 119–22). Hartmann's descriptive method does not provide "phenomenological descriptions." When outlining the differences, one must also take into account that the content of the concept of epoché is not constant in Husserl's works. "The [original] purpose of bracketing was not to examine in depth the objects of epoché themselves, but to reinterpret the ontological status of the external world. . . . Epoché leaves everything as it is, only (and this is not unimportant) it puts the ontological status of certain things in a different light. This original meaning of epoché was later expanded . . ." ("A zárójelbe tétel [erdeti] célja nem maguknak az epoché tárgyainak beható vizsgálata volt, hanem a külvilág ontológiai státuszának új módon való értelmezése. . . . az epoché mindent úgy hagy, ahogyan van, csupán (persze ez korántsem lényegtelen) bizonyos dolgok ontológiai státusza kerül általa más megvilágításba. Az epoché ezen eredeti jelentése később kibővült . . .") (Sümegi 2007, 117).

25. On Hartmann and phenomenology, see (Möckel 2012; Peterson 2019a; Pietras 2021, 474–80).

26. The term "theory" is here understood in the Aristotelian sense.

of the true dialectics of problems (Lukács 1984, 466–67).²⁷ In the background of Hartmann's rejection of artificial dialectics stands his critique of system-thinking: he prefers the systematic method of aporetic phenomenology to the synthetic method of system-builders. He accuses Hegel of committing the fallacy of the postulate of harmony (*Harmoniepostulat*), which merely conceals the contradictions in things. In Hartmann's words:

The seriousness of the antinomies is not done justice in this way. Of course, speculative syntheses may easily be constructed for each yawning antithetical opposition, but artificial syntheses [*konstruierte Synthesen*] are not solutions (Hartmann 2012, 350).

But true ontological antinomies cannot be solved by mere interpretation:

Instead, the antithetical opposition which one believes is overcome is in truth carried over into the 'synthesis,' lives on in it uninterrupted, and proves that the synthesis is a merely apparent unity (Hartmann 2012, 350).

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27. Lukács quotes Hartmann's book on Hegel, i.e., the second part of *Die Philosophie des deutschen Idealismus* (Hartmann 1929, 159).

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