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# Forum Philosophicum

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Volume 30 number 1 Spring 2025

Reading Nicolai Hartmann. Ideas and Dialogues

Alicja Pietras, Frédéric Tremblay, Leszek Kopciuch

Guest Editors

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# Reading Nicolai Hartmann. Ideas and Dialogues







## Introduction to the Issue

*Alicja Pietras, Frédéric Tremblay, Leszek Kopciuch*

This special issue is devoted to the philosophical legacy of Nicolai Hartmann (1882–1950), one of the most compelling and systematic thinkers of twentieth-century philosophy. In recent decades, Hartmann's work has attracted renewed scholarly interest, particularly in light of contemporary debates in ontology, philosophical anthropology, epistemology and the theory of values. Researchers have begun to rediscover the depth and relevance of his layered ontology, his concept of the real, and his critical engagement with both Neo-Kantianism and German idealism. They are also starting to explore the Russian context of Hartmann's thought.

Although Hartmann's influence has long been overshadowed by more dominant philosophical movements of the twentieth century, his thought offers an intellectually rigorous alternative to both existential phenomenology and analytic metaphysics. Recent studies emphasize his unique position as a thinker who bridges tradition and innovation—someone who maintained a deep respect for classical metaphysics while proposing a new, dynamic understanding of being and knowledge.

This issue brings together contributions that reflect the diversity and vitality of current Hartmann scholarship. Rather than offering a unified interpretation, it aims to open a dialogue—between Hartmann and his contemporaries, between his ideas and current philosophical concerns, and among the scholars who continue to explore the significance of his work. Our hope is that this issue will further stimulate critical engagement with Hartmann's philosophy and contribute to a broader recognition of his place within the canon of twentieth-century thought. Some of the articles in this issue have been selected from the papers presented at the Nicolai Hartmann

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International Conferences in Katowice, Poland (13–14 June 2019). Others—namely, those of M. Gargani, J. Fischer and L.F. Mendoza Martínez—are invited contributions.

In *Nicolai Hartmann and Vasily Sesemann: The Ontological Turn and the Dialectics of Being*, Alicja Pietras examines the parallel ontological turns of Hartmann and his friend Vasily Sesemann, where these are closely tied to their understanding and interpretation of Hegel's dialectics. She argues that Hartmann and Sesemann, who inspired each other, not only called for an ontological turn but also carried it out. According to Pietras, the essence of their ontological turn lies in an attempt to define being as a dialectical process.

Andrzej J. Noras (1960–2020) and Alicja Pietras, in *Nicolai Hartmann and the Marburg School*, explore the Marburg Neo-Kantian context of Hartmann's thought in order to shed new light on it. The novelty of their interpretation lies in the claim that a deeper understanding of the relationships and developments internal to the philosophical theories of the Marburg Neo-Kantian School (especially Hermann Cohen and Paul Natorp) reveals that Hartmann's project of a new ontology should not be seen as a complete departure from Neo-Kantianism, but rather as a critical continuation and reformulation of its ideas.

In his paper *The New Ontology and Modern Philosophical Anthropology: On the Elective Affinity between Two Twentieth-Century Theories*, Joachim Fischer discusses what he calls, using a Goethean expression, the "elective affinity" between Hartmann's ontology and the anthropological theories of Max Scheler, Helmuth Plessner and Arnold Gehlen. He argues that the relationship between Hartmann's ontology and philosophical anthropology is twofold. On the one hand, Hartmann's project of a new ontology was a condition for the possibility of modern philosophical anthropology; on the other hand, the emergence of philosophical anthropology played a crucial role in shaping the content of Hartmann's new ontology. Fischer refers to this interplay as the "Cologne constellation" of twentieth-century German philosophy.

Luis Fernando Mendoza Martínez, in his paper *Hartmann versus Heidegger on the Question of the Gnoseological Relation*, explores the concept of the gnoseological relation in Hartmann and Heidegger. The author defends Hartmann's ontology of cognition against Heidegger's criticism. Through a careful analysis of Hartmann's theses, he demonstrates that—contrary to Heidegger's claim—Hartmann neither conceives of the subject as an enclosed entity, nor grants ontological primacy to knowledge over experience in our access to the world.

The Hegelian theme in Hartmann's thought, touched upon by Pietras, is also developed by Matteo Gargani. His paper *Nicolai Hartmann's Interpretation of Hegel's Dialectics* offers a concise presentation of Hartmann's reading of Hegel in its historical context and outlines its principal historiographical aims. Gargani argues that Hartmann's interpretation of Hegel's dialectic as a "real dialectic" is closely connected to his engagement with the relationship between Aristotle and Hegel.

In *Nicolai Hartmann's Concept of Critique*, Bianka Boros explores the elements of Hartmann's philosophy that are most closely related to the concept of critique, including the tension between problem-thinking and system-thinking, the notion of the irrational, and critical approaches to ontology, epistemology and metaphysics. She also briefly presents the Hungarian philosopher László Tengelyi's criticism of Hartmann's concept of infinity and offers her own response to it.

The paper *Echoes of Nicolai Hartmann in Czech Philosophy*, written by Miloš Kratochvíl, addresses the reception of Hartmann's philosophy in Czechoslovakia—more specifically, in the thought of four Czech philosophers: Ferdinand Pelikán, Vladimír Hoppe, Jan Blahoslav Kozák, and Vladimír Kubeš. He shows that Hartmann's philosophy was well known among several Czech thinkers during the first half of the twentieth century.

In *Nicolai Hartmann's Conception of Freewill in the Context of the Debate Between Compatibilism and Incompatibilism*, Leszek Kopciuch presents a detailed and systematic analysis of Hartmann's concept of free will in the context of the debate between compatibilism and incompatibilism. He identifies internal tensions within Hartmann's ontology of freedom and argues that Hartmann's conception ultimately leads to the acceptance of indeterministic elements in the structure of reality.

This special issue also includes a translation, by Alicja Pietras and Predrag Cicovacki, of Hartmann's review of Vasily Sesemann's paper "*Die logischen Gesetze und das Sein*" ("Logical Laws and Being"), originally published in *Kant-Studien* in 1933 and republished in Hartmann's *Kleinere Schriften III* in 1958. The translation directly complements Pietras's paper on Hartmann, Sesemann and their dialectics of being.

All the papers contained in this issue were initially proofread by Frédéric Tremblay. For this service, the authors and the other editors would like to thank him most sincerely. We would also like to thank Leszek Kopciuch, Jacek Surzyn and Fernando Mendoza Martínez for their support at various stages of preparing this special issue. Special thanks are also due to Carl Humphries for proofreading the translation of Hartmann's text included

in the issue. And last but not least, we would like to thank all the reviewers for their valuable comments, which helped to improve each of the papers.

Alicja Pietras  
Frédéric Tremblay  
Leszek Kopciuch  
Guest Editors



## ARTICLES

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



*Alicja Pietras*


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

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

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The author would like to thank Vladimir Belov for sharing valuable comments on Sesemann’s interpretation of Hegel’s philosophy, and for providing the author with works on the subject in Russian. The author also thanks Frédéric Tremblay and Carl Humphries for the linguistic proofreading of the paper.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Nicolai Hartmann (1882–1950) and Vasily Sesemann (1884–1963) are both considered representatives of the so-called “ontological turn” that occurred in twentieth-century philosophy (e.g., Ebbinghaus 1954; Pietras 2011, 2012a; Belov 2019). Neither of them is widely known around the world. However, Hartmann, a Baltic-German who wrote in German and published his principal books at renowned German publisher (Walter de Gruyter), and who, during his lifetime, was a professor at several German universities (Marburg, Cologne, Berlin and Göttingen) as well as a member of the Prussian Academy of Sciences, is certainly far better known than his colleague. Sesemann, a Finnish-Russian-German-Lithuanian philosopher (Botz-Bornstein 2006, 7) born into the family of a medical doctor of Finnish-Swedish descent and a Baltic-German mother, a professor at Kaunas University and at the University of Vilnius, published in three languages (Lithuanian, Russian and German). Just his multilingualism alone makes it difficult to study his philosophy, and the fact that he never published his research in the form of books, but only as articles mostly published in Lithuanian journals, adds to this. The philosophical paths of Hartmann and Sesemann began together when they were studying at the German gymnasium in St. Petersburg and became very good friends for life. During their studies at the gymnasium, they spent the nights walking back and forth between each other’s apartments, discussing philosophical matters. They often spent holidays together in the rural house of the Sesemann family at the lake in Tikkala, Finland (Hartmann 2003, 10; Harich 2000, 3–4). After two years of medical studies at St. Petersburg University, Sesemann abandoned the idea of becoming a medical doctor and, following Hartmann’s suggestion, moved to the Historical-Philological Faculty there, where he studied and graduated in philosophy (Botz-Bornstein 2006, 10). In Marburg, both of them attended the lectures of Hermann Cohen and Paul Natorp. After World War I, Sesemann had difficulty finding employment, perhaps due to his peculiar ethnicity. In 1923, Hartmann recommended him for the newly opened professorship at Kaunas University in Lithuania. This finally allowed him to find employment. They both wrote papers<sup>1</sup> for the collection published on the occasion of Cohen’s seventieth anniversary in 1912 and, despite the fact that neither of them had become a Neo-Kantian or a phenomenologist, their research in each case remained deeply connected with both of these philosophical currents, as well as with the Russian intuitivism of their St. Petersburg

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### 3. THE ONTOLOGIZATION OF THE PROBLEM OF COGNITION

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

#### 4. THE ONTOLOGICAL TURN AS A TURN OF ONTOLOGY ITSELF

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

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

Thorsten Botz-Bornstein rightly observed that the starting point of the new branch of philosophy established and developed by Hartmann and Sesemann, which he called ontological gnoseology, was Kant’s question: “How can the same objects be real and ideal at the same time?” (Botz-Bornstein 2006, 34) They make this possible by presenting an ontological structure that can reconcile subjectivism and objectivism, which means that subject and object are treated as mutually co-determinate. When analyzing the process of cognition, Sesemann distinguishes objective (*gegenständliches*) from non-objective cognition (*ungegenständliches Wissen*) (Sesemann, 1927a), and Hartmann distinguishes the kind of being that has been objectified<sup>10</sup>

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

But the most important point here is that, according to Hartmann, all attempts to sublate the dialectical relation between subject and object—discovered by Kant and explored in detail by the Neo-Kantians—toward the higher (or, in other words, deeper) subjective perspective, as, for instance, Heidegger did, amount to a mistake that makes all these kinds of project critical but not ontological. Hence, Heidegger's philosophy is critical, but not truly ontological<sup>11</sup>—just as, for instance, the philosophies of Schopenhauer and Eduard von Hartmann can be called ontological, but not critical.

##### 5. THE MEANING OF HEGEL'S DIALECTICS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## 7. BEING AS DIALECTICAL PROCESS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

## 8. CONCLUSION

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

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

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# Nicolai Hartmann and the Marburg School



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**ABSTRACT** The paper deals with the Marburg Neo-Kantian's context of Nicolai Hartmann's (1882–1950) thought to show it under new light. The novelty of his view consists in claiming that a deeper knowledge of relationships and developments within the philosophical theories of the Marburg Neo-Kantian school (Hermann Cohen and Paul Natorp) leads to the recognition that Hartmann's project of a new ontology should no longer be seen as a complete departure from Marburg Neo-Kantianism but rather as a project born out of a criticism and reformulation of their thoughts.


**KEYWORDS** consciousness; Hartmann, Nicolai; Marburg School; metaphysics of cognition; Natorp, Paul; neo-Kantianism; ontology; phenomenology

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Ten years after Nicolai Hartmann's death, Herbert Spiegelberg published a book devoted to the phenomenological movement. Spiegelberg admits that counting Hartmann among the members of the phenomenological movement is at the very least questionable:

The right and the need to include Nicolai Hartmann in an account of the Phenomenological Movement are by no means beyond dispute. His inclusion will have to be justified by his actual significance for the development of the Movement, regardless of his own ambivalent relationship to it. (Spiegelberg 1960, 358)

Hartmann is undoubtedly difficult to classify. This difficulty has to do with the fact that Hartmann is also a Neo-Kantian, at least genealogically-speaking, and that his philosophy should be considered in light of Marburg Neo-Kantianism, amongst others. Martin Morgenstern confirms this difficulty. Writing about Hartmann's relationships with other twentieth-century metaphysicians, including his relationship with Max Scheler in the context of axiology and critical ontology, he notes: "this classification based on the history of philosophy does not yet provide an adequate picture of Hartmann's work."<sup>1</sup>

As a matter of fact, Hartmann's philosophical path did not begin in Marburg, but rather in St. Petersburg, or even in Dorpat. Hartmann studied medicine there, moving to St. Petersburg two years later. In St. Petersburg he met Nikolai Lossky and Alexander Vvedensky. This meeting can be seen as crucial for the philosophical development of Hartmann's thought. It is not without reason that Wolfgang Harich (1923–1995) associates the philosophy of Hartmann with that of the Russian thinkers. Harich writes:

Further characteristic of his background in the Russian cultural sphere are the early familiarity with Christian Wolff's ontology, which is by no means dependent on Hans Pichler, and the adoption of a "science of logic" that is independent of the German Hegelian Renaissance and contradicts its tendencies.<sup>2</sup>

1. "Diese philosophiegeschichtliche Einordnung liefert . . . noch kein adäquates Bild von Hartmanns Werk" (Morgenstern 1997, 7).

2. "Charakteristisch für seine Herkunft aus dem russischen Kulturkreis sind bei ihm ferner die frühe, keineswegs auf Hans Pichler angewiesene Vertrautheit mit der Wolffschen Ontologie und eine von der deutschen Hegelrenaissance unabhängige, ihren Tendenzen widerstrebende Rezeption der Wissenschaft der 'Logik'" (Harich 2000, 5). One must not forget that the revival of ontology in the early 1920s was generally associated with Pichler.

Hartmann's scientific path was closely connected to Marburg Neo-Kantianism, even though it later deviated from this movement. Although the scope of this deviation is the subject of much debate, it is nevertheless a fact. It is therefore advisable to examine Hartmann's scientific path to find out the sources of his inspiration and to thereby better understand his critical ontology. In this context, Hans-Johann Glock characterizes Hartmann's metaphysics as an "awakening of metaphysics." (Glock 2002, 98)<sup>3</sup>

Hartmann arrived in Marburg in the spring of 1905, year of the first Russian revolution. Władysław Tatarkiewicz, a Polish student in Marburg and a friend of Hartmann, writes about the unity of thought that was prevailing in Marburg at that time and about how this unity was shaped by the philosophies of Cohen and Natorp (Tatarkiewicz 2005, 277). It can also be assumed that problems with the unity of thought between the creator of the Marburg School, Hermann Cohen, and its co-creator, Paul Natorp, existed long before the appearance of Hartmann and Tatarkiewicz in Marburg. It is most often recognized that the turning point in the work of Hermann Cohen was his book *Logik der reinen Erkenntnis*, published in 1902 as the first part of a system of philosophy. However, the situation seems to be more complex. First, it seems unlikely that *Logik der reinen Erkenntnis* marks the moment of Cohen's departure from Kant. It rather seems like Cohen departed gradually from the *Critique of Pure Reason* and that this departure is linked to his recognition of Plato's special place in the Marburgian doctrine. Second, in connection with Plato's presence in the Marburgian doctrine, Karl-Heinz Lembeck claims that Natorp was never just an epigone of Cohen.<sup>4</sup> This entails that the problem of the relationship between Natorp and Cohen is, in fact, more complex than is often believed. Third, it must be admitted that Natorp's departure from Cohen was traditionally associated with the publication of the former's famous work in the field of psychology, *Allgemeine Psychologie nach kritischer Methode*, in 1912 (Natorp 1965). But a farther-reaching deviation occurred in 1917. This situation is well explained by Lembeck, who references Helmut Holzhey's book *Cohen und Natorp*. Lembeck names four reasons why Holzhey ends his comparative study of Cohen and Natorp at the year 1912: (1) there is no question that the late Natorp (especially since 1917) goes far beyond Cohen;

3. Glock cites Herbert Schnädelbach, who writes: "Nach der Jahrhundertwende nun kommt die Rede von der 'Wiedergeburt,' dem 'Wiedererwachen,' der 'Auferstehung' der Metaphysik auf" (Schnädelbach 2013, 232).

4. "In Wahrheit aber ist Natorp nie ein schlichter Epigone Cohens gewesen" (Lembeck 1994, 172).

(2) the doctrine of the Marburg School becomes significant, especially in the works of Cohen, Natorp, and Ernst Cassirer, from 1902 to 1912; (3) Cohen and Natorp's cooperation in Marburg ended in 1912 with Cohen retiring and moving to Berlin; (4) in 1912, Natorp published *Allgemeine Psychologie nach kritischer Methode*, considered a turning point of his philosophical path.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, it is clear that the problematic nature of the unity of the Marburg School also affects the perception of Hartmann's position within the framework of the largest Neo-Kantian school.

2. THE QUESTION OF THE BEGINNING OF HARTMANN'S PHILOSOPHICAL PATH  
Joseph Klein (1896–1976), who had been Hartmann's student and who was appointed to the University of Göttingen Georg-August in 1949, gave a speech on November 25th, 1950, in the auditorium of the university to commemorate the late Nicolai Hartmann, who had died on October 9th. This speech was later published in a commemorative book, which had previously been planned as a jubilee book on the occasion of Hartmann's seventieth birthday (Heimsoeth and Heiß 1952). Klein made Hartmann's attitude toward the Marburg School the subject of his analyses. It is therefore worth pointing out some of the key elements of Hartmann's doctrine that Klein discussed. Klein writes: "It was symptomatic of the beginning of our century when a scientifically-interested philosophical mind like Nicolai Hartmann looked at Marburg and finally, in 1905, at the age of twenty-three, found himself at the center of methodical idealism."<sup>6</sup> However, Klein's assessment of the situation is not entirely correct, because it does not take into account the four-year period after Hartmann had graduated from high school. Hartmann began medical studies in Dorpat (Tartu) in 1901.<sup>7</sup> After two years of study in Dorpat, Hartmann returned to St. Petersburg. Indeed, Klein

5. "Helmut Holzhey hat diesen Sachverhalt in seiner bemerkenswert eindringlichen Studie *Cohen und Natorp* ausführlich belegt. Sein Vergleich beschränkt sich aus verschiedenen Gründen auf die Zeit bis 1912. Denn erstens ist es keine Frage, daß der späte Natorp (deutlich ab 1917) weit über Cohen hinausgeht; zweitens wird die Marburger Schuldoktrin vornehmlich in den Werken Cohens, Natorps und Cassirers aus der Zeit von 1902 bis 1912 signifikant; drittens ist das gemeinsame Wirken von Natorp und Cohen in Marburg 1912 beendet, weil letzterer nach seiner Emeritierung nach Berlin zurückkehrt; und viertens schließlich erscheint im selben Jahr Natorps *Allgemeine Psychologie nach kritischer Methode* (AP), die vielfach bereits als Wendung in seiner philosophischen Konzeption betrachtet wurde" (Lembeck 1994, 172).

6. "Es war auch noch für die Jahre zu Beginn unseres Jahrhunderts symptomatisch, wenn ein wissenschaftlich so interessierter philosophischer Kopf wie Nicolai Hartmann nach Marburg schaute und schließlich im Jahre 1905 im Alter von 23 Jahren den Weg zum Zentrum des methodischen Idealismus nahm" (Klein 1952, 106).

7. One outstanding philosopher to have taught at the University of Dorpat is Gustav Teichmüller (1832–1888), who was primarily known as the founder of the conception of the history



does not refer to Hartmann's connection to Russian philosophy as Harich points out, citing from Hartmann's 1912 letter to Heinz Heimsoeth. Hartmann's words in this letter are not only characteristic of the beginning of his thought, but express his attitude toward the Marburg School in general. Herein, Hartmann writes: "Marburgian 'pure thinking' has long been foreign to me. Ten years ago, my first philosophy teachers in Russia taught me that there is 'intuitive and discursive thinking.'"<sup>8</sup>

There thus seems to be two different interpretations of Hartmann's philosophical development. The first is presented by Klein, who ignores or disregards the beginnings of his intellectual development in Dorpat and St. Petersburg. The second interpretation is proposed by Harich, amongst others, who takes into account the Russian beginning of Hartmann's philosophical path, thereby suggesting an explanation for Hartmann's later deviation from the doctrine of the Marburg School. Morgenstern rather connects this future deviation with phenomenology, writing that the influence of phenomenology was decisive for Hartmann's break with Neo-Kantianism.<sup>9</sup> Of course, one should ask whether this is justified, since Hartmann himself refers to his Russian teachers and since, at the same time, one should pay attention to the philosophy of Paul Natorp and to Hartmann's attitude toward it. Whereas Klein overlooks the Russian roots of Hartmann's philosophy, Harich claims that Hartmann comes to Marburg aware of the need to distinguish between intuitive and discursive thinking. Whereas Hartmann admits of a form of intuitive thinking in his ethics, the Marburgians did not accept such a mode of intuition.

### 3. DID HARTMANN DEPART FROM NEO-KANTIANISM?

However, there are also many reasons to claim that the philosophy of the Marburg Neo-Kantians strongly influenced Hartmann's thought. First of all, Klein emphasizes the importance of the scientific philosophy of the Marburg School for the young Hartmann: The Marburgian philosophy started as a critique of science, and philosophy as a science continued to be a predominant theme in Hartmann's intellectual life. We can already observe the beginning of these influences in the book that constitutes an extended

of philosophy as a history of concepts (Teichmüller 1874; 1876–1879). However, Teichmüller was already dead when Hartmann studied there.

8. "Das Marburger 'reine Denken' liegt mir seit lange etwas fern. Mir ist vor zehn Jahren von meinen ersten philosophischen Lehrern in Rußland eingepaukt worden, daß es 'intuitives und diskursives Denken' giebt" (Hartmann and Heimsoeth 1978, 127).

9. "Entscheidend für seine Loslösung vom Neukantianismus war der Einfluß der Phänomenologie" (Morgenstern 1997, 12).

version of his doctoral dissertation, namely, *Platos Logik des Seins*, published in 1909. Klein writes that “Hartmann’s book on Plato is a *hymnus demonstrativus* to Cohen’s philosophy of the origin. In this work, methodological idealism is presented in a manner in which not even the heads of the school had succeeded.”<sup>10</sup> Klein speaks of the complexity of the entire situation a few lines later, writing that this first work of the talented twenty-seven-year-old already contains statements that shed light on the position of his later works.<sup>11</sup> Hartmann therefore expresses the school’s position, while at the same time slowly beginning to distance himself from it. However, this distantiation happens gradually. In 1912, Hartmann publishes “Systematische Methode,” which is said to be the most perfect formulation of the Marburgian conception of the transcendental method.<sup>12</sup>

Regarding the questions of whether, when, and to what extent Hartmann’s analyses begin to depart from the Marburg Neo-Kantian program, one must consider that the year 1912 marked a breakthrough for the Marburg School. There are at least two reasons of that. The first one is the retirement of Hermann Cohen, who applied for retirement on June 5, 1912, and who subsequently moved to Berlin, where he became involved in activities of the Jewish community. The second reason, which seems to be much more significant, is Natorp’s publication in the field of psychology (Natorp 1965), which reveals far-reaching differences from Cohen’s position on this issue. Furthermore, it can be assumed, as both Christoph von Wolzogen (Wolzogen 1984) and Jürgen Stolzenberg (Stolzenberg 1995) have done, that Natorp’s conception of consciousness, presented in this book, is some form of deviation from Cohen’s doctrine, which played an important role not only for Hartmann’s philosophy, but also for that of Martin Heidegger. The publication of Natorp’s *Allgemeine Psychologie nach kritischer Methode* (1912) is almost groundbreaking for Marburg Neo-Kantianism, although, in principle, this book is a revised edition of a book from 1888 entitled *Einleitung in die Psychologie nach kritischer Methode* (Natorp 1888). In addition, in 1904 Natorp published his lectures on psychology—*Allgemeine*

10. “N. Hartmanns Platonbuch ist ein Hymnus demonstrativus auf Cohens Philosophie des Ursprungs. Der methodische Idealismus erfährt in diesem Werk eine Darstellung, wie sie den beiden Häuptern der Schule selbst nicht geglückt ist” (Klein 1952, 109).

11. “schon in dieser Erstlingsschrift des hochbegabten, aber noch ganz der Schule des meisters verhafteten Gelehrten von 27 Jahren finden sich Sätze, die ihr Licht auf Positionen seiner späteren Werke vorauswerfen” (Klein 1952, 110).

12. As Hartmann writes, “Transzendental ist eben ein Prinzip, sofern es die Bedingung der Möglichkeit von etwas Wirklichem ist. Und transzendente Methode ist dann dasjenige Verfahren, nach welchem man, von der Wirklichkeit des Gegenstandes ausgehend, die Bedingungen seiner Möglichkeit erschließt” (Hartmann 1912, 125).

*Psychologie in Leitsätzen zu akademischen Vorlesungen* (Natorp 1904). The concept of consciousness that Natorp presents in these lectures is important in the context of Husserl's analyses from the fifth logical investigation, "On Intentional Experiences and their 'Contents'" (especially §§. 4–8) (Husserl 2001, 85–93). Moreover, Natorp's subsequent approaches to logic should also be mentioned, namely, those from 1914 and 1916, as well as his latest works, i.e., his lectures on practical philosophy published in 1925 by Hans Natorp and his Marburg lectures from 1922/1923 published only in 1958 by Hinrich Knittermeyer (1891–1958) (Natorp 1958).

One could surmise that the beginning of the interpretation of Hartmann's philosophy as a departure from the Marburg School was a witticism that Heinz Heimsoeth made in his letter from November 28, 1915, to Hartmann: "in this Marburgian exile, we must form an 'alliance,' a community (more than three people. . .); we have to go around and recruit new, young, potential people and friends."<sup>13</sup> Hartmann, who was in Bytów at the time, replied in a letter from December 6: "How do you imagine this alliance? Totally free and pointless or with certain tasks? My hopes are not very great. I have always sought my real friends in the student body thus far."<sup>14</sup> Although the friends were just bantering, this banter had a source in reality. It seems that at least Heimsoeth noticed that their (i.e., his and Hartmann's) analyses departed from the way of thinking of their Marburg teachers. Morgenstern claims that the motive of such departure is Hartmann's orientation towards a realistically-understood ontology: "Hartmann's departure from Marburg Neo-Kantianism occurred as a result of the fact that he distanced himself from the idealistically grounded renunciation of metaphysics and made the rehabilitation of realism and ontology his philosophical life goal."<sup>15</sup> At the same time, Morgenstern rightly draws attention to the possible influence of Christian Wolff, although he omits to mention the significance of Hans Pichler's book, published at the beginning of the twentieth century, which describes the relationship between Wolff and Kant (Pichler 1910). In any

13. "wir müssen in dieser Marburgischen Verbannung einen 'Bund' zustande bringen, eine Gemeinsamkeit (von mehr als 3 Menschen. . .); wir müssen herumgehen und um neue, junge, mögliche Menschen und Freunde werben" (Hartmann and Heimsoeth 1978, 208).

14. "Wie stellen Sie sich denn Ihren Bund vor? Ganz zwang—und zwecklos oder mit gewissen Aufgaben? Meine Hoffnungen sind nicht sehr groß. Ich habe mir meine wirklichen Freunde und Freundinnen bisher immer in der Studentenschaft gesucht" (Hartmann and Heimsoeth 1978, 211).

15. "Hartmanns Loslösung vom Marburger Neukantianismus erfolgte dadurch, daß er sich von dessen idealistisch begründetem Metaphysikverzicht distanzierte und die Rehabilitierung von Realismus und Ontologie zu seiner philosophischen Lebensaufgabe machte" (Morgenstern 1997, 10).

case, the importance of Wolff and Pichler for the development of Hartmann's ontology cannot be overstated (D'Anna 2011, 253–68; Noras 2020, 488).

#### 4. RUPTURE IN THE UNITY OF THE MARBURG SCHOOL

The most conspicuous token of Hartmann's break with the doctrine of the Marburg School is his book *Grundzüge einer Metaphysik der Erkenntnis* from 1921, which took its final shape in 1925. One only need to glance at the history of philosophy to find traces of the view characteristic of *Grundzüge einer Metaphysik der Erkenntnis*. Jürgen Bona Meyer, who published four articles on the controversy over materialism, writes in the fourth article: "I believe that the relationship between body and soul is one of the problems that lie beyond the horizon of our knowledge; I believe that all metaphysical problems are of this kind, and I am of the opinion that Kant has proven it clearly enough for all time."<sup>16</sup> Hartmann's understanding of metaphysics and metaphysical problems is very close to that. According to his own definition, metaphysical problems are these problems that can never be completely solved because they contain an irrational rest. In this sense, this kind of problems are at least in some aspects beyond the horizon of our rationality and knowledge.

At the same time—as has already been mentioned—a gradual rupture in what may be called Marburg unanimity had been gradually taking place since 1912. This rupture, which begins with Natorp, is described in great detail by Helmut Holzhey in his two-volumes dissertation *Cohen und Natorp* (Holzhey 1986). This dissertation is worth mentioning here insofar as it changed the general opinion about the unity of the Marburg doctrine. In 1912, Natorp introduced the mature form of his psychology, which radically differed from Cohen's doctrine. As has already been mentioned, Natorp had already devoted several earlier texts to the issue of psychology. Already in 1888, he had argued that the answer to the question of consciousness must take into account that consciousness is a three-factor relation consisting of:

1. the content of consciousness,
2. the awareness of this content,
3. the act of awareness (the act of consciousness) (Natorp 1888, 11).

16. "Ich glaube allerdings, daß das Verhältniß von Leib und Seele zu den Problemen gehört, die über dem Horizont unserer Erkenntniß liegen; ich glaube, daß alle metaphysischen Probleme dieser Art sind und bin der Meinung, daß Kant für alle Zeiten dies scharf genug bewiesen hat" (Meyer 1857, 399).

This theme reappeared in Natorp's lectures in psychology published for the first time in 1904, wherein he writes:

In the basic fact of consciousness, several moments can be distinguished, which are indeed inseparably one, but may be kept strictly distinguished in reflection: 1. the content of which one is conscious (the content of consciousness), 2. the being-conscious of this content or its relation to a common center, the ego; which can be distinguished from the relation itself by a further abstraction as the third moment of the fact of consciousness.<sup>17</sup>

This thesis, which takes its final form in 1912, postulates the need to distinguish three moments in the concept of consciousness:

1. something of which someone is conscious,
2. someone who is conscious of something or of someone,
3. the relation (*Beziehung*) between them: the fact that someone is conscious of something.

Natorp adds, "solely for the sake of brevity, I call the first *content*, the second *the self*, the third *consciousness*."<sup>18</sup>

Natorp's departure from Cohen, for whom consciousness was a unity of scientific consciousness and in this sense a complement to the philosophy that established the fact of science as a starting point, is contained in what is said. That is why Siegfried Marck is correct when he writes that Natorp's book *Allgemeine Psychologie nach kritischer Methode* followed a new path not entirely accepted by Cohen.<sup>19</sup> In this environment, the prevailing understanding of philosophy in the Marburg School began to change. With Cohen's death on April 4th, 1918, the idea of consciousness understood as a relation began to dominate Natorp's thought.

At this point, the paths of Natorp and Hartmann are slowly beginning to converge again. The new work of Natorp, who is now departing from

17. "In der Grundtatsache des Bewußtseins lassen sich mehrere Momente unterscheiden, die darin zwar wirklich untrennbar eins, aber in der Betrachtung streng auseinanderzuhalten sind: 1. der Inhalt, dessen man sich bewußt ist (Bewußtseinsinhalt), 2. das Bewußt-sein des Inhalts oder seine Beziehung auf ein gemeinsames Zentrum, das Ich; welches man durch eine fernere Abstraktion als drittes Moment der Bewußtseinstatsache von der Beziehung selbst unterscheiden kann" (Natorp 1904, 3–4).

18. "Ich nenne, lediglich der Kürze der Bezeichnung halber, das Erste den Inhalt, das Zweite das Ich, das Dritte die Bewußtheit" (Natorp 1965, 24).

19. "Natorps 'Allgemeine Psychologie nach kritischer Methode' ging zuerst diese ungewohnten und auch vom Schulhaupt Cohen nicht voll gebilligten Wege" (Marck 1987, 21).

Cohen's doctrine, contains elements similar to Hartmann's views. Not only that, but Natorp's new work also bears similarities to the work of another important Marburgian philosopher, namely, Heidegger. In contrast, the third great disciple of the Marburg Neo-Kantians, Cassirer, definitely follows Cohen's path. Hartmann can thus be seen—contrary to Cassirer—as following in Natorp's footsteps. This interpretation is consistent with Klein's point of view, who writes: "Hartmann's ontology represents nothing else and nothing less than an attempt at a partial, because it is possible only in this way, implementation of the program of the categorial foundation of all philosophy, which was repeatedly expressed by P. Natorp."<sup>20</sup> Not only the paths of the Neo-Kantian masters, but also those of their students diverge among themselves. Whereas Cohen's idea that consciousness is the unity of scientific consciousness is echoed in the works of Cassirer, for whom consciousness is the unity of cultural consciousness, Natorp's conception of consciousness as a relation is also found in Hartmann.

However, when analyzing Natorp's understanding of consciousness, it is necessary to go back to the year 1910, when Natorp published a work in the field of logic entitled *Die logischen Grundlagen der exakten Wissenschaft*, wherein he writes that "thinking in general is a relating" (*Beziehen*).<sup>21</sup> Natorp associates his understanding of relations with Kant's philosophy and says that, although Kant did not use this term, he did use the expression "*dynamische Verknüpfung*" (dynamic connection) (Kant 1904, 176 [B 248] and 502 [B 798]). A year later, Natorp published a book on the basic problems of philosophy, in which he writes that "the being of thought can only be a being of relations more precisely of relations that 'are.'"<sup>22</sup> Karen Gloy is therefore correct, bearing in mind the Neo-Kantian attempts to understand consciousness, especially those undertaken by Heinrich Rickert and Paul Natorp, when she writes that Natorp understood consciousness as a relation between two different elements (Gloy 2004).

## 5. DIVERGENCE FROM NEO-KANTIANISM

Naturally, Hartmann's philosophy also diverges from the philosophy of the Marburg School. This divergence first became visible with the publication of *Grundzüge einer Metaphysik der Erkenntnis*. Joseph Klein writes that

20. "Hartmanns Ontologie stellt nichts anderes und nicht weniger als den Versuch einer partialen, weil nur so möglichen Durchführung des von P. Natorp immer wieder ausgesprochenen Programms der Kategorialen Grundlegung aller Philosophie" (Klein 1952, 106).

21. "Denken heißt überhaupt Beziehen" (Natorp 1910, 67).

22. "Das Sein des Denkens kann nur Sein der Beziehung sein; Beziehung eben 'ist'" (Natorp 1911, 37–38).

Hartmann's *Metaphysik der Erkenntnis* definitively breaks away from Marburgian Neo-Kantianism as a system and its "epistemological monologue," summarizing everything that had hitherto been achieved in that area.<sup>23</sup> The situation with the new ontology is unclear, however. Two issues need to be discussed from the outset. The first is the nature of this new ontology, which, despite having nothing to do with the doctrine of Cohen, might nevertheless be linked to the ideas of Natorp. The second pertains to what we have called "Post-Neo-Kantianism" (see Noras 2004; 2007; 2012b; Pietras 2011; 2012). The Post-Neo-Kantians start with Neo-Kantianism, but are convinced that Kant has been misinterpreted in Neo-Kantianism. On this issue, Joseph Stallmach writes that Hartmann's radically ontological thesis of the existence of a being-in-itself (*Ansichsein*) clearly indicates a confrontation with Neo-Kantianism.<sup>24</sup>

The question of who truly understands Kant's philosophy—not its letter, as the early Neo-Kantians wanted, but rather its spirit—can be considered fundamental to all of Neo-Kantianism.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, Hartmann shows that Cohen goes beyond the philosophy of his time and that he follows the spirit of Kant's doctrine, but that he does so in a way that is unacceptable from the point of view of critical ontology (Hartmann 1912, 125; 1921, 277; 1955, 122). This is one of the ways in which Hartmann dissociates himself from Marburg Neo-Kantianism.

Therefore, it is better to speak in terms of a divergence from the Marburg School instead of a complete rupture with its program. In *Studien zur Transzendentalphilosophie* (1965), Manfred Brelage is not so much concerned with the development of Hartmann's philosophy as with its reception

23. "Das Werk N. Hartmanns, in dem die definitive Abrechnung mit dem Neukantianismus Marburger Prägung als System und seinem erkenntnistheoretischen Monolog erfolgte und das alles in dieser Hinsicht bisher Geleistete und Erarbeitete zusammenfaßte, ist seine 'Metaphysik der Erkenntnis' von 1921" (Klein 1952, 122).

24. "Die radikalontologische Ansichseinsthese Hartmanns trägt deutlich die Züge der Auseinandersetzung mit seiner eigenen Herkunft aus dem Neukantianismus" (Stallmach 1982, 616).

25. Hartmann raises this question when referring to his teacher: "Die reife Formel dieses Kategorienverhältnisses wurde auf dem Boden des transzendentalen Idealismus von Kant gefunden und als Identitätsthese ausgesprochen. Sie wurde dann durch die spekulativen Systeme des deutschen Idealismus völlig verdeckt und in dem langjährigen Kampf des Positivismus gegen die letzteren vergessen. Erst die weiseren unter den Neukantianern (Hervorhebung von mir) haben sie aus ihrer Vergessenheit wieder hervorgeholt und sie an die ihr gebührende Stelle gesetzt auch sie immer noch auf idealistischen Voraussetzungen fußend und ohne die ganze Tragweite des von Kant Geleisteten erfassen zu können, denn zu ihrem vollen Sinn kommt die Identität von Erkenntnis—und Seinskategorien erst auf dem Boden der Ontologie." (Hartmann 1955, 122)

by contemporaries and by posterity. He writes that at first Hartmann appeared as a phenomenologist, who had realized the implicit intention of phenomenology to arrive at an ontology of the real world, and that it was only in the recent years that the continuity of Hartmann's ontology with the thought of his Marburg teachers had become apparent. According to Brelage, after having been viewed as an antipode of Neo-Kantianism for a long time, Hartmann now rather appears as a continuator and "over-comer" of criticism. His philosophy cannot be understood without referring to it. In "Nicolai Hartmann 1882–1982" (1982), Josef Stallmach claims that by recovering ontology, Hartmann had put an end to Marburg Neo-Kantian idealism and that he had gnoseologically grounded critical realism anew on Kantian soil.<sup>26</sup>

Other commentators also speak in terms of partial divergence rather than in terms of complete departure from Neo-Kantianism. Morgenstern, for instance, writes that in his essays published in 1912, especially in *Systematische Methode* (1912) and *Systembildung und Idealismus* (1912), Hartmann began to carefully distance himself from Marburg idealism without openly breaking with it.<sup>27</sup> In his text on the history of philosophy, Klein notes that Hartmann's *Der philosophische Gedanke und seine Geschichte* (1936) contains the results of his polemic with the historical construction of Marburg Neo-Kantianism.<sup>28</sup> The problem of the history of philosophy and of its method was one of the most important issues within Neo-Kantianism and Hartmann's conception of these problems should be seen as a creative development and reformulation of Neo-Kantian ideas rather than as their rejection (see Noras 2012a).

## 6. CONCLUSION

An attempt at summarizing the above considerations must lead to the conclusion that the perception of Hartmann's philosophy in the secondary literature changes in light of what is believed to be Hartmann's principal sources and influences. Four different approaches can be distinguished

26. "Hartmann hat mit der Wiedergewinnung der Ontologie einen Schlußpunkt hinter den Marburger neukantischen Idealismus gesetzt, er hat gnoseologisch den Realismus, einen kritischen Realismus, im Lande Kants neu begründet" (Stallmach 1982, 615).

27. "In den Aufsätzen dieser Zeit, besonders in *Systematische Methode* (1912) und *Systembildung und Idealismus* (1912), beginnt eine vorsichtige Distanzierung vom Marburger Idealismus in methodischen Fragen, ohne daß jedoch ein offener Bruch erfolgt wäre" (Morgenstern 1997, 18).

28. "Das Ergebnis der Auseinandersetzung N. Hartmanns mit der Geschichtskonstruktion des Marburger Neukantianismus findet sich in einer seiner kostbarsten Abhandlungen 'Der philosophische Gedanke und seine Geschichte' (1936)" (Klein 1952, 121).



in Hartmann scholarship wherein it has been shown that elements of the Marburg School are present in his philosophy.

Undoubtedly, the first approach is taken by these scholars who consider as most important the year 1921, year of the publication of *Grundzüge einer Metaphysik der Erkenntnis*. According to this approach, Hartmann is considered a phenomenologist with no ties to Neo-Kantianism (Spiegelberg 1960, 358–89).<sup>29</sup>

The second approach involves the assumption that Hartmann comes from the Marburg School, considers its problems, and analyzes them (Klein 1952). Adopting this approach, some have argued that what Hartmann criticized was not Neo-Kantianism in general, but rather Cohen in particular, whose doctrine he saw as an idealism (Noras 2005, 219–25; Brelage 1965, 159–60). On this interpretation, as a critical realist Hartmann is strongly opposed to Cohen's transcendental idealism.

The third approach corresponds to the recognition that Hartmann's departure from Marburg Neo-Kantianism is also a return to Kant. When I speak of a "return to Kant," I mean Hartmann's Post-Neo-Kantianism (Noras 2004; 2007; 2012b; Pietras 2011; 2012). In this context, however, it should be remembered that Hartmann is a thinker of the movement that, at the beginning of the twentieth century, interprets Kant's philosophy metaphysically, i.e., ontologically. This movement includes thinkers, such as Martin Heidegger, Karl Jaspers, and Richard Höningwald, who go beyond the boundaries of epistemologically-oriented Neo-Kantianism and turn toward ontology.

Finally, the fourth approach consists in an attempt to better illustrate the sources of Hartmann's philosophy in the context of the Marburg School (Noras 2005). On this approach, Hartmann is seen as a thinker who, unlike Cassirer, ceases to follow Cohen, and who follows in the footsteps of Natorp instead. This hypothesis looks promising but needs to be examined in further details.

Therefore, Hartmann's relationship with the Marburg School is undeniable, but not as simple as it may appear at first sight. As I tried to show above, there are several reasons for that. First of all, the question of the relevance of Russian thinkers for Hartmann's thought still needs to be considered (Pietras 2025). In this context, the question arises as to whether

29. It may be tempting to identify Hartmann as a phenomenologist because of the phenomenological part of his ontological method. But one must remember that this is only the first step of his philosophical method and that it is followed by two further steps, namely, those of aporetics and theory (Hartmann 1921).

Hartmann's development truly begins with Neo-Kantianism. Secondly, even if we acknowledge that at least some parts of Hartmann's philosophy start with essentially Marburgian problems, can we say that at the beginning he was part of the school and that he suddenly at one point turned against it? Maybe one should speak not in terms of a complete rupture, but rather in terms of a partial divergence from Neo-Kantianism. And, thirdly, the thesis of Hartmann's divergence from Neo-Kantianism starts to look more questionable when we consider ongoing research on the Marburg School, especially on the relations between Cohen and Natorp, in which it has been shown that Marburg Neo-Kantianism was not as united as it might have appeared at first sight. Hartmann, just like Heidegger, seems to be particularly indebted to Natorp, but not to Cohen (Stolzenberg 1995, 259–94).

#### AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Alicja Pietras: Argument Development, Formatting, Editing, Proofreading.

Andrzej Noras: Literature Review, Conceptualization.

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# The New Ontology and Modern Philosophical Anthropology


## On an Elective Affinity Between Two Twentieth-Century Theories

*Joachim Fischer*

**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.<sup>1</sup> 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<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup>

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" ("Categorical 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).<sup>4</sup>

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.<sup>5</sup> 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).<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup>

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 categorical 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.<sup>8</sup> 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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# Hartmann versus Heidegger

## A Re-Evaluation of the Gnoseological Relation

*Luis Fernando Mendoza Martínez*

**ABSTRACT** The intention of this paper is to question Heidegger's criticism of Hartmann's approach to the gnoseological relation and to show that his interpretation of what the Baltic-German philosopher had in mind in his first major work, *Grundzüge einer Metaphysik der Erkenntnis*, was biased. I start by presenting the context of the Heidegger-Hartmann debate on the subject-object relation. Secondly, I briefly reconstruct Heidegger's approach to the gnoseological relation and explain why, according to him, Hartmann's stance is subject to his criticism of the subject-object relation. I then present the main features of Hartmann's conception of the gnoseological relation and his peculiar idea of representation as projection as well as his gnoseological stance of human subjects as eccentric beings. Finally, I state a criticism of some of the main features of Heidegger's conception of *Dasein*, and I argue that Hartmann's idea of the subject-object relation is more accurate in describing and apprehending our reference to the world.

**KEYWORDS** gnoseological relation; Hartman, Nicolai; Heidegger, Martin; subject-object relation

But in certain regard, our analysis of the phenomenon of cognition deviates from that of the phenomenologists. The latter exclusively abide by what is immanent in the phenomenon and they do not allow for the transcendent to speak in its own way of being. This is not so much an inconsequence of the method as a one-sidedness of their interest for the phenomenon, more precisely, the remnant of a prejudice of perspective. So far, phenomenology has been hindered in its own development by the spell of the *philosophy of immanence*, which in the end rests on an idealistic prejudice.

Nicolai Hartmann, *Grundzüge einer Metaphysik der Erkenntnis* (1949a, 77)

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The following ideas are focused on Hartmann's first major work, *Grundzüge einer Metaphysik der Erkenntnis* (1925, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), and are aimed at defending his approach against Heidegger's criticism regarding subject-object relation of being (*Seinsverhältnis*). In *Being and Time* (1927), Heidegger expressed his disagreement with Hartmann's metaphysical grounding of cognition. In the final footnote of § 43 he states:

Following Scheler's procedure, Nicolai Hartmann has recently based his ontologically oriented epistemology upon the thesis that knowing is a "relationship of Being." Cf. his *Grundzüge einer Metaphysik der Erkenntnis*, second enlarged edition, 1925. Both Scheler and Hartmann, however, in spite of all the differences in the phenomenological bases from which they start, fail to recognize that in its traditional basic orientation as regards Dasein, "ontology" has been a failure, and that the very "relationship of Being" which knowing includes (see above, H. 59 ff.) compels such "ontology" to be revised *in its principles*, not just critically corrected. Because Hartmann underestimates the unexpressed consequences of positing a relationship-of-Being without providing an ontological clarification for it, he is forced into a "critical realism" which is at bottom quite foreign to the level of the problematic he has expounded. On Hartmann's way of taking ontology, cf. his "Wie ist kritische Ontologie überhaupt möglich?," *Festschrift für Paul Natorp*, 1924, 124 ff. (Heidegger 1962, 493)

In this fragment, Heidegger asserts that Hartmann's methodological procedure fails because it is not a radical revision of the principles of ontology, more specifically the ones regarding the subject-object relation. Besides, according to Heidegger, the Baltic-German philosopher apparently remains within the conception of being as present-at-hand (*Vorhandensein*), i.e., the conception of being as presence (*Anwesenheit*). However, a careful reading of Hartmann's treatise reveals that he proposes to begin not from what we are looking for (namely, the principles), but rather by asking how, in fact, the subject apprehends being. Ontology should not start by establishing ontological principles, because if we want to discover the principles of being, we must first clarify how subjects, in general and not only theoretically, have an *apprehending* relation with *being*.<sup>1</sup> This is Hartmann's

1. It must be remarked that A. Vigo has acutely pointed out the way in which Heidegger distances himself from the traditional conception of ontology as a science of first causes and principles (ontology as *archaeology*) and proposes a new approach: ontology as *alethiology*

critical reassessment of the ontological status of knowledge and, to accomplish it, he is compelled to reevaluate the experience of cognition. For him, experience does not start with knowledge, but rather knowledge is already immersed in experience. In *Grundzüge einer Metaphysik der Erkenntnis*, Hartmann asks: “Is it not rather the case that the knowing consciousness is always and everywhere embedded in a certainly unending empiria, from which it can never detach itself?”<sup>2</sup>

However, it must be also admitted that the experience is simultaneously affected by knowledge. This prompts Hartmann’s reason for proposing the analysis of the gnoseological relation—the subject-object relation—as the starting point towards a revision of the foundations of ontology. This revision is aimed at showing the foundations of cognition in experience in a broad sense of the latter term. By contrast, Heidegger’s general approach, based on the analysis of *Dasein*, intends to present the foundations of the understanding of being without asking about knowledge, because he regards it as a secondary fact—as an abstract and purely theoretical relation, which is not originally embedded in facticity. For Heidegger, in general, there is no cognition in understanding being. However, from Hartmann’s perspective, our everyday experiencing and understanding of being is also determined by the activity of cognition and its structures. Therefore, to obtain a more exhaustive description of the everyday understanding of being, it is necessary to thoughtfully consider the ontological structure of subject-object relation.

To begin with, this article presents Heidegger’s reasons for claiming that the human being exists transcendently as a Being-in-the-world and for depicting knowledge as derived from an original horizon: the world of involved engagement that is correlative to everyday practical behavior. Secondly, from the perspective of the existential analytic, it addresses Heidegger’s criticism of the theoretical conception of the subject-object relation. In his view, this conception implies that the subject is primarily enclosed, distant from the world. Supposedly, each and every explanation

(Vigo 2008, 117–18). Hartmann’s perspective, as presented in “Wie ist kritische Ontologie überhaupt möglich?,” could be included under this archaeological conception (which can be traced back to Aristotle), but only after acknowledging his criticism of the way in which the inquiry into the ontic principles has been undertaken (Hartmann 1924, 133). Until the contemporary ontological discussion settles the deep and finely balanced dispute over the metaphysical assumptions behind each model of the “science of being,” it must not be taken for granted that one of these approaches is more accurate than the other.

2. “Ist es nicht vielmehr so, daß das erkennende Bewußtsein immerfort und allseitig in einer freilich langwierigen, nie abreißen Empirie begriffen ist?” (Hartmann 1949a, 112).

of our relation to the world drawing from the subject-object relation implies an insurmountable abyss, and that criticism is also valid for Hartmann's metaphysical approach. In contrast to that, Heidegger intends to prove that the being that we are, the *Existenz*, is not an enclosed entity and, consequently, that it is false to claim that the human being can eventually "reach the world."

After presenting Heidegger's approach, instead of taking his criticism as accurate, the subject-object relation will be considered based on Hartmann's own theses.<sup>3</sup> The key to his stance is the non-traditional way in which he considers the idea of a relation of being (*Seinsverhältnis*). It will be clear that Hartmann neither holds the subject to be an enclosed entity nor believes that knowledge has ontological prominence over experience in our access to the world. Instead, we seek to demonstrate that one achievement of Hartmann's *Metaphysik der Erkenntnis* was to illuminate the ontological constitution of the activity of cognition and, more precisely, the role that representation plays in the task of apprehending the world as it is. The key to understand the role of representation is what Hartmann conceives as *projection* (*Projektion*). By considering such projection, it can become clear how it is that the subject-object relation need not necessarily imply an supposedly insurmountable abyss. Given this, Hartmann's conception of the gnoseological relation will be presented from an empirical point of view: the *eccentric stance* (*exzentrische Stellung*) of subjects being understood with reference to a primary common world. In the closing discussion, Hartmann's ideas about projection and the eccentric stance will then be contrasted with Heideggerian ideas as these relate to the connection of *Dasein* and world, and the alleged transcendental unconcealing capacity (*Erschlossenheit*, ἀλήθεια) of Heidegger's idea of the understanding of being will be put in question. Finally, Hartmann's own conception of ἀλήθεια, based on his idea of the eccentric stance, will be briefly sketched.

3. Steffen Kluck has pointed out the one-sidedness, and its unavoidable omissions, that has been repeatedly developed under the Heideggerian perspective regarding Hartmann's approach (Kluck 2012, 196, note 6). In this article, we acknowledge the influence of Kluck's work, especially regarding his attempt at a historic and theoretical rectification of Hartmann's philosophemes. Nevertheless, this research has as its point of departure in a questioning of Kluck's assessment of Heidegger's supposedly convincing criticism of the subject-object relation (Kluck 2012, 215).

## 2. FROM *EXISTENZ* TO *DASEIN*: THE TRANSCENDENTAL CHARACTER OF THE PRE-ONTOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING OF BEING<sup>4</sup>

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger claims that to answer the question of the meaning of being “we lack not only most of the words but, above all, the ‘grammar’” (Heidegger 1962, 63). One of Heidegger’s intentions is to reform the conceptual tasks of philosophy by reformulating the basic question of ontology. Accordingly, the question of the meaning of being, and not of what being is, has a double intention: (1) to rescue the inquiry of being from the forgetfulness in which it has fallen due to the impossibility of defining being in the manner of traditional logic (Heidegger 1962, 23); (2) to make fruitful, for the purposes of ontology, the natural and obvious understandability of the word “being.”

The natural understanding of being lies in the entity that has the possibilities of “looking at,” “asking for,” and “conceiving as.” Heidegger asserts: “this entity which each of us is himself and which includes inquiring as one of the possibilities of its Being, we shall denote by the term ‘*Dasein*’” (Heidegger 1962, 27). It must be noted that Heidegger uses the expression *Dasein* in an uncommon way. *Dasein* demands to be interpreted with a different grammar to the one used to name other entities: it must be understood solely as an expression of being. *Dasein* is the fact related to the possible ways of taking care of our being (Heidegger 1962, 67). In this sense, Heidegger’s existential analytic is an attempt to compensate for what is missing in the traditional interpretation of being: an adequate conception and grammar of the being that we are and, on these grounds, a new conception of our possibilities for understanding being.

Heidegger is cautious enough to distinguish our pre-ontological character of being (*Dasein*) from our ontic mode of being (*Existenz*). He claims that the “essence of *Dasein* lies in its existence” (Heidegger 1962, 67). For him, existence is “having-to-be” (*zu-sein*), which means that its being is a task for itself: “That kind of Being towards which *Dasein* can comport itself in one way or another, and always does comport itself somehow, we call ‘existence’ [*Existenz*]” (Heidegger 1962, 32). In Heidegger’s approach,

4. Following Ángel Xolocotzi’s remarks, “*Being and Time*” can be understood in three senses: (1) the treatise as it has been published, (2) the plan sketched in § 8 and (3) the exposure of the mutual belonging of being and *Dasein* through the transcendental horizon (temporality) (Xolocotzi 2004, 22–25). In what follows, I understand “*Being and Time*” as Heidegger’s comprehensive efforts to develop the idea of the mutual belonging of being and *Dasein* through the transcendental horizon of temporality. I take this project to be the same as the project of the early teachings from Marburg and Freiburg until 1928. Therefore, I rely on Heidegger’s ideas from both the treatise *Being and Time* and the early teachings from Marburg and Freiburg, without seeking to distinguish sharply between these.

human existence stands out from the rest of entities because in it occurs an understanding of being. This is the pre-ontological determination of our existence. This pre-ontological determination plays a decisive methodical role in Heidegger's approach, because the existential analytic of human *Dasein*—the describing of its manner of understanding being—can become the core and the legitimate matter of ontology only insofar as *Existenz* goes beyond itself. Therefore, *Dasein*'s understanding of being must be shown in its transcendental character.

The key concept when it comes to accounting for the transcendental feature of the pre-ontological understanding of being is what Heidegger calls facticity (*Faktizität*). The facticity of existence, i.e., in each case mineness (*Jemeinigkeit*), is exercised in a world of involved engagement, in a work-world. Heidegger defines the concept of the facticity of human existence as follows: "The concept of 'facticity' implies that an entity 'within-the-world' has Being-in-the-World in such a way that it can understand itself as bound up in its 'destiny' with the Being of those entities which it encounters within its own world" (Heidegger 1962, 82). On the grounds of this concept, the distinction between authenticity and inauthenticity (*Eigentlichkeit-Uneigentlichkeit*) becomes intelligible in its ontical sense: what is at stake is the possibility of the human's having to choose itself or lose itself (Heidegger 1962, 68). The alternative is to understand our possibilities either from oneself or from a different entity. The *Existenz* can understand itself in its own possibilities from its own being or can fall from itself to understand its possibilities from the entities that appear within its world (Heidegger 1962, 85).<sup>5</sup>

Following the notion of facticity, it is evident that the *Existenz* is involved with entities that differ from its own way of being. This involvement occurs within a previously disclosed familiar context of significant references. In this context, things are what they are only in a totality of involvement (*Bewandtnisganzheit*). This totality is disclosed for-the-sake-of (*Worumwillen*) *Dasein*'s being. The previously disclosed context is that upon-which (*Woraufhin*) the entities appear as they do: this is the structure of meaning (*Sinn*) (Heidegger 1962, 193). The wherein of the act of understanding where it previously lets the entities appear for the sake of *Dasein*'s being is what Heidegger names world (Heidegger 1962, 119). This is to say that

5. On this matter, in his contributions to a Spanish companion to *Being and Time*, César Pineda has pointed out the singularity of human *Dasein*, which consists in having this possibility of choosing or losing itself. No other entity, no animal or tool, has this possibility growing from its own being (Pineda, 2019).



*Existenz* exercises itself within a world in a transcendental manner: by freeing the involvement of things for the sake of its own being. For Heidegger, *Existenz* is primarily a Being-in-the-world. For inasmuch as the human being is a Being-in-the-world, its *Dasein*, its understanding of being, consists in an *a priori* disclosure of a significant-world, a totality of meaning. And this is to say that: “whenever we encounter anything, the world has already been previously discovered, though not thematically” (Heidegger 1962, 114).

At this point, the investigations of *Being and Time* reveal the transcendental constitution of *Existenz*. Only because of this transcendentality can the analytic of existence be considered acceptable starting point for a fundamental ontology. On these grounds, Heidegger contrasts the primary and pre-theoretical way of dealing with meaningful entities with a secondary, thematizing behavior that consists in a distant pure-looking-at present entities, such as occurs in the act of world-knowing (*Welterkennen*). According to him, his phenomenological approach escapes from the false problem of transcending the closed sphere of the subject in the direction of the world as is demanded by the modern theoretical subject-object model. That is because while this model draws on the necessity of proving access to the world, the phenomenological description of the everyday world instead needs no explanation of such access: any pragmatic dealing with something already discloses the world as meaningful. Being involved and engaged with something is a primordial form of access. Taking this into consideration, we will see why Heidegger claims that the gnoseological relation is a deficient starting point for describing relations between humans and the world.

### 3. HEIDEGGER’S CRITICISM OF THE SUBJECT-OBJECT RELATION

As mentioned earlier, *Existenz* can fall and understand itself according to an entity that is not itself. This inauthentic understanding, this falling (*Verfallen*), occurs because *Existenz*, in fact, transcends and discovers a meaningful world. Inauthenticity means that, in the work-world, the pre-understanding of being overlooks its primary character of caring (*Sorge*) its own being. In fact, it is absorbed by what is discovered as an intentional-objective pole of its everyday behavior: the entity that is ready-to-hand (*Zuhandenheit*). Due to the falling tendency of everydayness, the previous disclosure of the world for the sake of *Existenz*’s being remains hidden, both immediately and regularly. This “unknowingness” results in the fact that the subject-object relation comes to be immediately assumed when interpreting the bond between “soul” and “world.” Within this obliviousness,

subject-object relation is conceived under the traditional idea of being present-at-hand (*Vorhandensein*), whose temporal qualification is presence (*Anwesenheit*). Presences entail that being is unmovable, atemporal. Accordingly, Heidegger points out that “like any other entity, *Dasein* too is *present-at-hand as Real*. In this way ‘*Being in general*’ acquires the meaning of ‘*Reality*’” (Heidegger 1962, 245). Hence, according to the idea of “reality,” the specific mode of being of *Existenz* as exercise (*Vollzug*) and the entity’s primary form of being within the world (*Zuhandenheit*) are distorted; the temporality of the bond of soul and world is devaluated. On these grounds, theoretical approaches are prone to conceiving of both subject and object as subsisting entities enclosed in themselves and, consequently, those approaches seek to demonstrate how the subject can reach the external world—or even how communication between substances is possible. According to Heidegger, all theoretical attempts to understand the relation between the subject and the world “presuppose a subject which is proximally worldless or unsure of its world, and which must, at bottom, first assure itself of a world” (Heidegger 1962, 250). In this situation, knowledge becomes a quest to obtain *certainty* about access to world. While certainty is required, the subject-object relation is most properly understood from the perspective of a theoretical framework, remote from our *everyday experiencing of the world*.<sup>6</sup> By interpreting knowledge as primary access to the world, our everyday behavior is degraded and disfigured, as the expression “*non-theoretical*” suggests (Heidegger 1962, 86).

In Heidegger’s opinion, the interpretation of knowledge from the above-mentioned perspective is merely formal and external. This interpretation comes from a poor understanding of cognition as an activity of isolated subjects instead of an activity of subjects embedded in the world. That poor understanding is also based on the ignorance of knowledge as a derived mode of care that comes from the impossibility of using tools within a primary pragmatic context (Heidegger 1962, 88).<sup>7</sup> Because of the forgetfulness

6. The idea that the theoretical attitude implies a de-vivification of the immediate and environmental world goes back to the *Kriegsnotsemester* lecture of 1919 (Heidegger 2000, 71–79).

7. We cannot overlook the fact that for the edition of *Being in Time* included in the *GA*, Heidegger added a note that shows a self-critical spirit regarding his early interpretation of “knowing” as a deficient mode of the being concerned with tools. He claims: “The looking-at [*Hinsehen*] does not stem from looking-away-from—it has its own origin and that looking-away-from is its necessary consequence; the-looking-at has its own authenticity. The looking at εἶδος demands something else” (Heidegger 1977, 83, note a). In my opinion, that original and positive interpretation of the theoretical attitude within the context of a hermeneutic phenomenology remains unresolved. Even Gethmann’s instructive and revealing interpretation of Heidegger’s conception of truth is still bound to the latter’s assumption of knowledge

of its caring, the theoretical perspective conceives of the world as nature, which is constantly present-at-hand. In opposition to external nature—as Heidegger points out in his summer lecture of 1925 (Heidegger 1985, 160) and later in *Being and Time*—knowledge must occur within the subject, but not as a mere physical or psychical process. Were this to be so, the subject would not transcend its own sphere. And yet the problem of theoretical reference to the world precisely consists in explaining the leap from the subject's sphere to that of the object: i.e., offering answers to the question of “how this knowing subject comes out of its inner ‘sphere’ into one which is ‘other and external,’ of how knowing can have any object at all, and of how one must think of the object itself so that eventually the subject knows it without needing to venture a leap into another sphere” (Heidegger 1962, 87).

Hence, the problem of knowledge should be an attempt to answer these states of affairs which, as Heidegger insists, arise from ignorance of the “worldhood” of cognition. In theoretical approaches, according to him, the specific characters of being of all knowledge, knowing entities and known objects are overlooked. In other words, there is a silence over the primary phenomenon of Being-in-the-world, over the previous pragmatic discovery of the surrounding world (*Umwelt*). This silence, according to Heidegger's critique, is nothing but a feigning construal of the “problem of knowledge” as a genuine problem. Against that, one of the tasks of philosophy is to eliminate inauthentic problems and open the way to things themselves, as he suggests in his Marburg lecture published as *History of the Concept of Time*. By eliminating these apparent problems, and by simultaneously assuming the interpretative framework of the existential analytic, he thinks that an authentic approach to knowledge can emerge. In this manner, he states: “Knowing understood as apprehending has sense only on the basis of *already-being-involved-with*. This already-being-involved-with, in which knowing as such can first ‘live,’ is not ‘produced’ directly by a cognitive performance; Dasein, whether it ever knows it or not, is as Dasein already involved with a world” (Heidegger 1985, 162).

From the perspective of Being-in-the-world, the attitude of knowing is already projected by its facticity onto an “outside.” Likewise, the practical object of behavior always comes forth “within” a world that was previously disclosed synchronously with the behavior that makes up our existence.

as a derived behavior within the discovery of the primary world (Gethmann 1993, 121–28). In the third section of this article, I reevaluate, from a Hartmannian perspective, the inherent ontological consequences of the existence of a gnoseological relation.

Through its everyday understanding of being (*Da-sein*), our *Existenz* previously discovers a meaningful world that, in each case, is for the sake of our singular being. On this ground, “knowing” is conceived as a modified form of involvement that may open new possibilities for our mundane existence, which can be carried out in an autonomous way, as we can see in the scientific way of living. However, Heidegger emphatically claims that “a ‘*commercium*’ of the subject with a world does not get created for the first time by knowing, nor does it arise from some way in which the world acts upon a subject. Knowing is a mode of *Dasein* founded upon Being-in-the-world” (Heidegger 1962, 90).

Thus far, the distinctive features of Heidegger’s critique of the theoretical conception of the subject-object relation as developed in the ontological project of *Being and Time* have been summarized. This critique of the subject-object relation affected how he and his followers read Hartmann’s *Metaphysics of Cognition* in the second half of the 1920s and onwards. However, in the specific case of Hartmann’s conception of the subject-object relation, this critique by Heidegger presupposes two things: first, that Hartmann assumed the primary access to the world to be through knowledge, and second, that from an ontological perspective the Baltic philosopher uncritically understood both subject and object according to the idea of being as present-at-hand (*Vorhandensein*). Yet this is surely not the case. Heidegger’s understanding of Hartmann’s approach is limited because, by focusing mainly on the substantial character of being of subject and object, he is far from considering the complex ontological constitution of the Hartmannian idea of relation of being (*Seinsverhältnis*). Consequently, Heidegger fails to distinguish between the starting point of Hartmann’s analysis—his phenomenological revision of traditional approaches to knowledge—and Hartmann’s ontological stance towards the solution of the aporias of cognition. These misunderstandings led Heidegger to qualify Hartmann’s approach as another form of “critical realism.” But Hartmann was cautious in labeling his own position as another form of realism, at least from the outset. He claims that “it is impossible to label ontology as a realism from the outset. This contradicts its innermost tendency.”<sup>8</sup> Heidegger overlooked the fact that, in Hartmann’s approach, the key to the ontological explanation of the subject-object relation is on this side (*diesseits*) of the realism-idealism dispute, which has an epistemic origin and history.

8. “Es geht also nicht an, die Ontologie von vornherein als Realismus abzustempeln. Das widerspricht ihrer innerstlichen Tendenz” (Hartmann 1949a, 199).

Thus, we must first turn to Hartmann's conception of cognition as apprehension (*Erfassung*). We will see that the Baltic-German philosopher does not conceive the subject-object relation from a merely theoretical perspective, but also from an empirical one. Therefore, the issue of how the knowing attitude can access the world is not problematic in character. And yet, for him, the problem of the objectivity of knowledge remained an open-ended one. The Hartmannian approach to the problem of the objective validity of knowledge will not be considered here. Instead, our goal is to show, by highlighting Hartmann's ontological solution to the fundamental aporia of knowledge, that the gnoseological relation is attached to an extended complex of ontological relations. Through this conception, Hartmann can legitimately defend his idea of cognition (*Erkenntnis*) as apprehension and can account for the fact of γνῶσις through representation (*Bild, Abbildung*) without assuming a disconnection or a trivial duplication of the world. On such grounds, the Heideggerian critique of Hartmann's approach can be shown to be inadequate.

#### 4. HARTMANN'S CONCEPTION OF COGNITION AS APPREHENSION

The leitmotiv of *Grundzüge einer Metaphysik der Erkenntnis* is clearly expressed at the beginning of the preface to the first edition, where Hartmann writes: "Metaphysics of cognition (*Metaphysik der Erkenntnis*)—which is meant to be a new name for the theory of knowledge (*Erkenntnistheorie*)—is better than the criticism of knowledge (*Erkenntniskritik*): it is not a new metaphysics whose foundation would be knowledge, but rather only a theory of cognition whose foundation is thoroughly metaphysical."<sup>9</sup> Thus, the purpose of Hartmannian gnoseology was to rediscover the metaphysical foundations of cognition.

When Hartmann published *Metaphysics of Cognition*, the main representatives of the *Erkenntniskritik* movement that he was arguing against were furnished by Neo-Kantianism and phenomenology (understood in the transcendental sense).<sup>10</sup> In Hartmann's opinion, the metaphysical assumptions

9. "Metaphysik der Erkenntnis—das will ein neuer Name sein für Erkenntnistheorie—besser als Erkenntniskritik: nicht eine neue Metaphysik, deren Grundlage Erkenntnis wäre, sondern durchaus nur Erkenntnistheorie, deren Grundlage metaphysisch ist" (Hartmann 1949a, III).

10. By 1927, Heidegger also conceived of his ontological project of *Being and Time* as a transcendental science of being, but with the pretension of offering a more original elaboration than Kant's conception of the character of the transcendental (Heidegger 1982, 17). On how Hartmann's motivations go beyond the Neo-Kantian mainstream, and how his interpretation of Kant is radically different from Heidegger's, see Alicja Pietras (2011, 237–39, 242–50). Herbert Spiegelberg referred to Hartmann as an eccentric member of the phenomenological movement, and apparently for good philosophical reasons, but also accurately stated that the

behind those trends were idealistic: i.e., they involved assumptions based on a reflectively determined conception of being. A few years later, in *Zur Grundlegung der Ontologie*, published in 1935, Hartmann identified another form of that reflectively articulated conception of being in Heidegger's ontological approach. According to Hartmann, Heidegger's idealism is most obvious in his conception of tool-being that is derived from his phenomenological-hermeneutical approach (Hartmann 1965, 71–76). What is remarkable for our discussion is that Heidegger underestimated Hartmann's early criticism of phenomenology in *Metaphysik der Erkenntnis*, which is concerned with the ontological status of intentionality. This underestimation, reproduced by Heidegger's followers, has remained undisputed. In what follows, I appropriate the Hartmannian criticism of phenomenology with a view to questioning Heidegger's conception of the subject-object theoretical relation in *Being and Time*. The point of departure for this appropriation will be the understanding of the metaphysical turn in Hartmann's inquiry into knowledge.

In contrast to his contemporaries, Hartmann's intention was to show the unavoidability of metaphysics in the analysis and understanding of the gnoseological relation. Thus, he states:

As long as we abide by the original sense of cognition as the apprehension of a being, there can be no doubt why this layer of problems is a metaphysical one. We could call it the ontological side of the problem of knowledge, since its center of gravity lies in the character of being as such, which belongs to the object of cognition.<sup>11</sup>

The object of cognition is *being as such*. Hence, Hartmann claims that cognition is neither a sort of creating (*erschaffen*) nor a kind of producing (*erzeugen, hervorbringen*) of the object (*Gegenstand*) of knowledge, but the apprehension of something (*ein Erfassen von etwas*) that previously exists

Baltic thinker was suspicious of the hidden idealism in Husserl's perspective (Spiegelberg 1994, 306–7). For a recent and relevant discussion of Hartmann's critical attitude towards phenomenology, see Möckel (2012, 105–27). Perhaps the key to understanding Husserl's and Hartmann's different conceptions of phenomenology lies in the former's idea of phenomenological research as a science, whilst for the latter, phenomenology is a methodological moment of philosophy as science.

11. "Solange man an dem ursprünglichen Sinn der Erkenntnis als dem Erfassen eines Seienden festhält, kann auch kein Zweifel daran sein, warum diese Problemschicht eine metaphysische ist. Man möchte sie als die ontologische Seite des Erkenntnisproblems bezeichnen, denn ihr Schwerpunkt liegt in dem Charakter des Seins als solchen, der dem Gegenstande der Erkenntnis zukommt" (Hartmann 1949a, 15).

(*ist vorhanden*) independently (*unabhängig*) from its being-known (Hartmann 1949a, 1). Accordingly, he conceives of cognition as a transcendent activity: an apprehension of something that is not subject-dependent: i.e., not merely immanent. In that sense, his criticism is addressed against that dominant point of view, which presumed that it is possible to explain knowledge without elucidating the problem of being.<sup>12</sup> His criticism draws from questioning those perspectives which bestow ontological pre-eminence upon the subject's activity and therefore uphold a reflectively constituted conception of the entity's being.

Hartmann claims that cognition is the transcending apprehension of something that exists prior to and independently of the act of knowing. The expressions "*ist vorhanden*" and "*unabhängig*" should not be understood here, as Heidegger did, as something that refers either to a prominent entity or to a temporal determination such as presence. In this context, the previous existence means that the subject does not produce the existence of its object of cognition; such independence means that the existence of the object and its determinations, despite its necessary reference to the subject, is not caused by any specific gnoseological action on the part of the subject. The previous existence and independence of cognition's object is gnoseological. Taking this into consideration, if we follow Hartmann's theses, it is more accurate to interpret the gnoseological meaning of "*ist vorhanden*" as indicative of a form of ontological selfsistance (*Selbstständigkeit*).<sup>13</sup> This is the driving idea behind the notion of *Ansichsein* as a suitable concept

12. Husserl clearly expresses his abstention from any metaphysical commitment in his early work *The Idea of Phenomenology* (Husserl 1991, 19). Heinrich Rickert's philosophy can be considered to represent another form of avoidance regarding the question of real being (Rickert 1921, 205).

13. The German words *Selbstständigkeit* and *Unabhängigkeit* are both commonly translated in English by the word "independence." However, there is an evident difference in the etymological roots of the German words. Certainly, *Unabhängigkeit* is best translated as "independence," because the verb *hängen* is the precise translation of the Latin verb *pendere*, which means "to hang." So, etymologically speaking, "independence" means "not hanging from anything." But *Selbstständigkeit* is directly related to the verb *stehen*, which is also linked to the Latin verb *stare* and the Greek one ἵστημι, <Pass., ἵσταμαι>. All of them derive from the Proto-Indo-European root *\*sta-*, which means "to stand," "to be," "to take place." Thus, etymologically, *Selbstständigkeit* means "to stand," "to be," or "to take place by itself." Given these considerations, I suggest translating *Selbstständigkeit* by the expression "selfsistance." In this word, the elements of the German word are in concordance with the possibilities of the English language. In the context of our discussion, the object of knowledge is any form of *selfsistance*, any form of being-in-itself (*Ansichsein*), which, in the ontological sense, is not limited to real being, but also includes ideal being and the entities that depend on human activity, such as intentional objects, representations, and even assertions. Hartmann expressed this idea later in *Zur Grundlegung der Ontologie* (Hartmann 1975, 142–44).

for the object of cognition. Hartmann uses the concept of “apprehension” to vindicate the ontological selfsistance of the object’s being. Ontological selfsistance is a prior condition for gnoseological *independence* (*Unabhängigkeit*). Thus, to grasp the object of knowledge is, in fact, to apprehend the determinations that constitute the being of an object.<sup>14</sup> Hartmann affirms that “the difficulty of the concept of ‘apprehending’ lies precisely in the concept of being that must be apprehended.”<sup>15</sup> Thus, although the concept of *Gegenstand* contains a subject-dependent moment (*gegen*), it also refers to the selfsistance of what stands in front of us (*stehen*).<sup>16</sup> In cognition, what can be known is the graspable aspect of the object’s being, an aspect partially grasped by our cognitive activity. To sum up, for Hartmann the object’s being is not placed in front (*vor-stellt*) of the subject but rather apprehended by him in the way the object confronts him.

The activity of apprehension is a relation of being (*Wesensverhältnis*) in which the subject and the object stand *vis-à-vis* each other. Subject and object are separate and mutually transcendent because they are selfsistant, because “both have a being-in-itself.”<sup>17</sup> On such grounds, Hartmann states that the gnoseological relation is bilateral (*zweiseitig*) but not reversible (*nicht umkehrbar*), which is to say that the functions of subject and object are not interchangeable (*nicht vertauschbar*), because they are essentially different (*wesensverschieden*). In knowledge, the object is indifferent towards the subject, but not the other way around. So, Hartmann affirms that the “function of the subject consists in an apprehending of the object, whereas

14. We must be careful not to prematurely interpret the simple act of apprehending as truthful knowledge. Since criteria of truth are not contained in the simple act of apprehending, we cannot uncritically affirm the truthfulness of this act. In what follows, it must be considered that knowledge does not necessarily mean, for Hartmann, true knowledge. Indeed, the Baltic philosopher highlights four meanings of the concept of knowledge. They are inseparable from each other and should not be understood as meanings from which one can choose: (1) knowledge as relation-of-being; (2) knowledge as gnoseological structure; (3) knowledge as truth; (4) knowledge as progress (Hartmann 1949a, 58). In this article, I will only be working with the first three meanings. Also, I treat his concept of “knowing as apprehending” as a helpful and encompassing hypothesis that should be maintained through each phase of knowledge so that the latter can show its own complex structure: i.e., its overlapping and embedded character.

15. “Die Schwierigkeit im Begriff des ‘Erfassens’ haftet Eben am Begriff des Seins, welches erfasst werden soll” (Hartmann 1949a, 16).

16. G. D’Anna has remarked that, for an accurate interpretation of Hartmann, it must be understood that in the expression *Gegenstand* there is not only a subjective moment, but also an independent moment indicated in the “*stehen*” or the “*Ständigkeit*” of what stands in front of us (D’Anna 2011, 262). The gnoseologically independent moment of the *Gegenstand* already includes the meaning of *Selbstständigkeit* as explained above in footnote 13.

17. “Haben beide ein Ansichsein” (Hartmann 1949a, 61).



the object's function consists in being apprehensible for the subject, and in becoming apprehended by him."<sup>18</sup> Through apprehension, subject and object become entangled in a reciprocal relation: the subject apprehends and objectifies determinations of the object (*Gegenstand*), and these object determinations become objectified (*wird objiziert*) by him. From a metaphysical point of view, the gnoseological problem consists in explaining the meaning of "apprehending" and "being-apprehended." The question is how the subject and the object become entangled without eluding the essential differences that have a determining role in the gnoseological relation. Hartmann's aporetic consideration of these apparently incompatible modes of being (being-in-itself and being-apprehensible) is the key to understanding his treatment (*Behandlung*; Hartmann 1949a, 316) of the antinomy of apprehension.

In contrast with Hartmann, the perspective of *Erkenntniskritik* assumed the impossibility of apprehending the *Ansichsein*, the selfsistance of entities. On this approach, there is no metaphysical component within knowledge. Beginning with a one-sided and misleading ontological conception of the principle of consciousness (*der Satz des Bewußtseins*), *Erkenntniskritik* suspends the selfsistance of the object and remains in the field of immanence. According to that principle, "consciousness cannot apprehend other than its own contents and, therefore, it is hopelessly trapped in itself."<sup>19</sup> But, if that were the case, it would then be impossible for the object to determine the subject, while for Hartmann, the gnoseological relation is a unilateral determination (*einseitige Bestimmung*) of the subject by the object (Hartmann 1949a, 321). To clearly understand this unilateral gnoseological determination, it must be noted that Hartmann's partial solution to the aporia of apprehension draws from two main theses: the acknowledgment of the selfsistance of both subject and object, and the acceptance of their belonging, at least partially, to a common connection of being (*Seinszusammenhang*). Thus, Hartmann's ontological solution to the gnoseological antinomy of apprehension goes as follows:

18. "Die Funktion des Subjekts besteht in einem Erfassen des Objekts, die des Objekts in einem Erfasßbarsein für das Subjekt und Erfasßtwerden von ihm" (Hartmann 1949a, 44).

19. "Das Bewußtsein nicht als seine eigenen Inhalte erfassen kann und somit unrettbar in sich gefangen ist" (Hartmann 1949a, 93).

Through their selfsistance, subject and object obtain a common essential feature which relates them, the being . . . So, subject and object stand in front of each other *as members of a connection of being*.<sup>20</sup>

This connection of being is complexly constituted and, therefore, irreducible to a gnoseological correlation. Furthermore, subject and object are ontologically related from the outset and, secondly, become gnoseologically correlated. Hartmann emphasizes that the “real being-confronted-to-each-other of consciousness and of its object is precisely a presupposition of knowledge.”<sup>21</sup> The Baltic-German philosopher thereby sheds light on the problem of how the subject can be in gnoseological with an existing object.

Hartmann’s metaphysical turn in the explanation of knowledge demands that we understand gnoseological activity as a secondary process embedded in other ontological relations. He affirms that

cognition is a *secondary ontological structure* [*Gebilde*]. It is one of many relations of being, but a totally secondary and dependent one in its assembling [*Gefüge*]. Because knowledge is dependent on the being of the object and the subject, whereas their being is not dependent on cognition.<sup>22</sup>

In that sense, Hartmann’s gnoseology is the starting point for a theory of ontological relations in which the relation of knowledge is endowed with a peculiar status amidst other more fundamental relations. This status is what Hartmann tried to show through the analysis of the constitution of the gnoseological formation of representation.

##### 5. HARTMANN’S CONCEPTION OF THE GNOSEOLOGICAL FORMATION (*ERKENNTNISGEBILDE*): REPRESENTATION (*ABBILDUNG*) AS PROJECTION (*PROJEKTION*)

To understand Hartmann’s depiction of the subject as being determined by the object in the gnoseological relation, the activity of cognition must

20. “Subjekt und Objekt gewinnen durch diese ihre Selbstständigkeit einen gemeinsamen Grundzug, der sie verbindet, das Sein . . . Subjekt und Objekt stehen einander also als *Glieder eines Seinszusammenhangs* gegenüber” (Hartmann 1949a, 320).

21. “Das reale Sichgegenüberstehen des Bewußtseins und seines Gegenstandes ist eben Voraussetzung der Erkenntnis” (Hartmann 1949a, 205).

22. “Erkenntnis ist ein ontologisch sekundäres Gebilde. Sie ist eine von vielen Seinsrelationen, aber in deren Gefügen eine durchaus sekundäre und abhängige. Denn Erkenntnis ist zwar vom Sein des Gegenstandes und des Subjekts abhängig, dieses aber nicht von ihr” (Hartmann 1949a, 205–6).

be understood as immersed in a more extended connection of being (*Seinszusammenhang*). As mentioned earlier, knowledge is embedded in experience and, accordingly, experience involves cognition. For Hartmann, the gnoseological confrontation of subject and object is already present in experience and is not a mere theoretical assumption. Contrary to a purely theoretical understanding of the subject-object relation, Hartmann points out that “even the non-scientific consciousness is a cognitive consciousness.”<sup>23</sup> The gnoseological relation is not a modification of everyday behavior, but an ontological constituent of our experience of the world. The ontological feature of the gnoseological relation is the production of a partial objectification of the existing objects; this objectification is the subject’s activity within the gnoseological relation, and the content of this objectification is determined by the self-sistant object. Besides this, since Hartmann understands both naive and scientific attitudes as being affected by the whole structure of cognition, their phenomena must be taken into consideration within the explanation of the overall gnoseological activity. From this perspective, for Hartmann, both Neo-Kantianism and phenomenology are one-sided in their explanations of cognition: the former because it limits itself to scientific mathematical knowledge, the latter because it limits itself to unprejudiced consciousness (Hartmann 1949a, 40–44).<sup>24</sup> Contrary to these tendencies that restrict themselves to a limited field of givenness (*das Gegeben*), Hartmann states that the analysis of knowledge must consider a wider experiential basis, so that its interpretation does not fall prey to the same bias. His intention is to examine the widest field of givenness possible (Hartmann 1949a, 43).<sup>25</sup> The matter in question, it may be said, is not the act of knowledge, but rather the *experience of cognition*.

It must be remarked that, if we stick to the affirmation of experience as a prior connection of ontological relations in which the subject and the object are confronted, there is no need to keep asking the question of how an apprehending consciousness “can be in contact” with an existing object outside of it. Certainly, Hartmann uses the metaphor of “reaching out” to an

23. “[Indessen] auch das nichtwissenschaftliche Bewußtsein ist erkennendes Bewußtsein” (Hartmann 1949a, 41).

24. On this topic, Heidegger also expressed his deep disagreement with Husserl. For him, Husserl’s aim to achieve a prejudice-free methodological procedure is a utopian goal (Heidegger 2005, 2).

25. Alicja Pietras even affirms that “Hartmann’s notion of ‘givenness’ is the widest notion of ‘givenness’ in all the history of philosophy. The new ontology should start from the analysis of all givenness, from all that we experience, and Hartmann means not only scientific and philosophical experience but also life experience” (Pietras 2011, 247).

object in his first approaches to the *phenomenon* of knowledge, but it is to establish the transcendence, the mutual *Urgeschiedenheit* of both subject and object (Hartmann 1949a, 44–45). A few years later, in *Das Problem der Realitätsgegebenheit*, Hartmann stated the following to clarify his approach:

The popular mode of representation of the subject as if it were first trapped in itself and then had to break free to gain consciousness of reality . . . is not mine. From the outset, there is no genuine consciousness that does not stand open to the course of real occurrences.<sup>26</sup>

However, in *Metaphysik der Erkenntnis* Hartmann already offered an explanation in which the being-confronted of objects and subjects is not seen through the metaphor of “stepping out, being outside, and returning.” If we accept that subject and object are ontologically related in experience, and that the activity of apprehension occurs within the latter, then the metaphor of “stepping out” is something different from bridging the gap with things themselves. By reevaluating experience as a connection of being in which apprehension occurs, Hartmann cancels the assumption of an insurmountable abyss between subject and world. The original differentiation of subject and object is not an ontological gap, but an ontological form of relation. The cognitive consciousness, consequently, does not cancel the connections with the world, but is rather the capability of apprehending and reflecting the differentiation of ontological relations.

By contrast, the idealistic interpretation of cognition conceives consciousness as an *ontologically closed sphere*; idealism negates, or at least suspends, the ontological weight of any other form of being than consciousness. It is as if consciousness were a superior, a more powerful mode of being than the other ones of the existent world. For Hartmann, this conception is a one-sided interpretation of the phenomenon of cognition, which focuses mainly on the selfsistance of consciousness and devaluates the selfsistance of objects. Idealism grants a superior ontological status to the immanent and correlational structure of consciousness by considering that somehow the object’s being is produced by the subject’s activity. However, Hartmann claims that traditional idealism disregarded the fact that the “principle of consciousness is already a gnoseological principle.”<sup>27</sup> This is as much

26. “Die beliebte Vorstellungsweise, als wäre das Subjekt zuerst einmal in sich gefangen und müßte dann erst ausbrechen, um ein Realitätsbewußtsein zu gewinnen . . . ist die meinige nicht. Es gibt kein wirkliches Bewußtsein, das nicht von vornherein aufgeschlossen im Zuge der Realgeschehnisse drinstände” (Hartmann 1931, 90).

27. “Der Satz des Bewußtseins ist schon ein gnoseologischer Satz” (Hartmann 1949a, 94).

as to say that the idea of a consciousness imprisoned is late evidence based on scientific-gnoseological reflectiveness, and runs contrary to our everyday experience, in which we naturally distinguish between how things are and how we think of them. Furthermore, to acknowledge an imprisonment implies a previous differentiation: specifically, that between an inside and an outside. This differentiation is only possible if the subject's consciousness is somehow affected by a different form of being. Hartmann conceives the principle of consciousness not as something that produces isolation, but as a form of link consisting in an objectification: i.e., a reflection of a limited range of ontological connections and determinations (Hartmann 1949a, 328). The reflection during cognition is a sign of the fact that the gnoseological apprehension is mediated by a gnoseological formation which is at stake in the subject's activity of objectification.

The presence of a mediating formation between subject and object proves to be necessary when recognizing cognition as an activity of apprehension immersed in experience, and when admitting that the knowable objects neither become determined nor are created by this apprehension. Hartmann affirms that, through apprehension, some features of the object can reappear "within" the subject. But insofar as it is *sensu stricto* impossible for the object to be inside the subject, the fact that features of the object reappear "within" the subject necessitates the presence of a hybrid intermediating structure of being in the gnoseological process. For Hartmann, that structure is a subjective cognitive formation (*Erkenntnisgebilde*), which emerges because of the act of apprehension, and at the same time can have objective validity by representing some determinations and relations of the knowable object. This representative formation is, thus, an image (*Bild*) or a reproduction (*Abbildung*) of existent objects. For the Baltic-German philosopher, what is altered by the act of apprehension is not the psychic interiority of the subject, but this gnoseological structure, which is inseparable, of the subject's act of apprehension and their being aware of the existing object (Hartmann 1949a, 48). The phenomenon of apprehension, metaphysically conceived, implies these interwoven moments: the encountered object, its apprehension, and its representation.

Hartmann proves the presence of representation by pointing to the consciousness of error and illusion, which could not be explained if there were no structure mediating the gnoseological experience.<sup>28</sup> There can

28. In his theory of the mediating structure, Hartmann is in tune with Aristotle, who in his *De Anima*—more specifically in his meditation on phantasy—is concerned with the commonly overlooked problem of falsehood. Due to this common neglect, according to Aristotle, each

only be illusion and error on the basis of an ontological confrontation: the selfsistance of the object allows the subject to contrast it with its own thoughts. Through the recognition of falsehood, the subject becomes aware of the possibility of apprehending the existent object:

not as it is in itself, but rather *as it is seen, apprehended, or interpreted*. This difference comes to consciousness where the content of a new apprehension enters in opposition to a previous apprehension.<sup>29</sup>

The activity of apprehension is oriented towards the existing objects, but it also encompasses previous and simultaneous subjective prejudices and assumptions. For Hartmann, the apprehension of the world is a mediated one (Hartmann 1949a, 328.) The entire activity of knowledge, which implies an auto-corrective representation of the selfsistance of the objects, would be impossible if there were no other selfsistant elements to contrast each new apprehension with and thus correct, or extend, our subjective representation of the world. To that extent, Hartmann claims in his phenomenology of cognition that

given that the process of experience, as progressive knowledge, essentially consists in the progressive correction of illusions and errors, a reflection on the image, and also a *consciousness of the image*, is also given with it.<sup>30</sup>

It must be said that the existence of the gnoseological formation has historically been denied on account of its double dependence. Hartmann outlines this dependence when he points out that the image is neither merely constituted by the subject, nor just rooted in the object, but determined by both. Seen from the subject's perspective, the reproduction belongs to experience and is thus modified by its process. From the object's point of view, however, it shares with it the objectuality (*Gegenständlichkeit*):

perception and intellection is always considered as truthful (Aristotle, *De Anima*, 427b1–3). Our Hartmannian interpretation of the performance of the gnoseological structure is prompted by Aristotelian discoveries regarding phantasy. For a relevant contemporary discussion of the Aristotelian conception of the latter, see (Ferrarin 2006, 89–123).

29. "Nicht wie er an sich ist, sondern *wie er gesehen, erfasst oder gemeint* ist. Zum Bewußtsein kommt dieser Unterschied, wo erneutes Erfassen zu erstmaligem Erfassen in inhaltlichen Gegensatz tritt" (Hartmann 1949a, 46).

30. "Da . . . der Prozeß der Erfahrung, als einer fortschreitenden Erkenntnis, wesentlich in fortschreitender Berichtigung von Täuschungen und Irrtümern besteht, so ist mit ihr auch die Reflexion auf das Bild, also auch ein *Bewußtsein des Bildes*, gegeben" (Hartmann 1949a, 46).

i.e., the possible concordance with the existing object.<sup>31</sup> The dual dependence of representation prevents an understanding of it as a mere “copy” of the object. This is because, if representations were copies of what exists, “then all knowledge would be true and adequate.”<sup>32</sup> Hartmann asserts the dual dependence of representation, but with two provisos: we should not assume that, through representation, the existent object becomes somehow placed inside the psychic sphere of the subject, and we should not attribute the same type of selfsistance to the principle of consciousness as the one that befits the existent subject and object. The alleged trivial duplication of entities is thereby prevented: the representation is a hybrid form of being, different from subject and object.

According to Hartmann, the representation “appears” (*erscheint*) within the common sphere of being in which subject and object confront one another. Hartmann acknowledges the appearing of the representation in the world through an intentional act of *projection*. He states:

The accurate imagery (analogy) for the mode of being of a structure which exists only on the ground of an act—in this case, on the ground of the act of looking—and yet ‘appears’ in the world of the being-in-itself, is that of *projection*.<sup>33</sup>

31. This does not mean that Hartmann’s proposal should be understood as if there were a trivial duplication of objects (a realm of intentional objects and another of real objects), as Maria van der Schaar interprets it (Schaar 2001, 287). For Hartmann, intentional objects are not selfsistant as existing objects, because they depend on the subjective structure of apprehension. They do not exhibit the same ontological sufficiency as beings of the world. They exist because of acts of cognition, but apprehension does not consist simply in making a copy of the existing world. Intentional objects are no duplication of the world, but rather another form of being which can be contrasted in its content with existing objects. Furthermore, intentionality, given that it exists as a specific form of being, is different from how we represent it in our reflective activity. Otherwise there would not be any question about how to research, make progress with, and correct our ideas about intentionality.

32. “So wäre alle Erkenntnis wahr und adäquat” (Hartmann 1949a, 80).

33. “Das zutreffende Bild (Gleichnis) für die Seinsweise eines Gebildes, welches nur auf Grund des Aktes—in diesem Falle des Hinblickens—besteht, und dennoch in der Welt des Ansichseienden ‘erscheint,’ ist die *Projektion*” (Hartmann 1949a, 123). Through a discussion of projection, Hartmann’s criticism of Husserl’s phenomenological notion of intentionality can also be validated, since it affects the idea of an intentional horizon. In general, Hartmann disputes the idea that the theory of intentionality—the *inexistence* of the object as dependent on subjective acts—furnishes an adequate approach when it comes to explaining the empirical character of the relation of knowledge. It is certainly the case that, drawing on the notion of intentionality, and through an emphasis on the execution of the act, phenomenology questions the validity of the principle of consciousness and everything that derives from it (Hartmann 1949a, 106). However, to that extent it is also the case that “the phenomenologist, provided that he remains only in the intention, only sees half of the phenomenon, namely, the

His main contribution in this regard is to show that the subjective reproduction is a hybrid way of being: i.e., a hybrid form of selfsistance, which does not produce images inside of the subject's consciousness, but rather consists in a projection that places an objectified sphere within the world. For Hartmann, that objective sphere is dependent on, and correlative to, the subject. In such a sphere, the existing objects are objectified (*objiziert*), and the objectification claims to be valid objectively. The projection delimits the subject's sphere and, correlatively, projects a court of objects (*Hof der Objekte*). As Hartmann states:

The existent subject delimits, as it were, through the threads of the relation of knowledge that converge in him, a portion of the sphere of being as its sphere of objects; the expression 'court of objects' does not mean anything more than this.<sup>34</sup>

For Hartmann, the representation as projection belongs to the world, i.e., has a form of objectivity (*Form der Gegenständlichkeit*), and, at the same time, is conditioned by the subject. Each new apprehension is affected by a subjective afterimage (*Nachbild*) (Hartmann 1949a, 122). Due to the subjective persistence of representation, existing objects are not simply apprehended as they are but also represented according to the subject's previous experience. Each new apprehension is conditioned by what has been known and unknown. Because each act of apprehension implies projective afterimages, a new apprehension can become inadequate despite the vivid presence of the existing object. Therefore, the subjective persistency of the projection plays a central role for both error and truth.

non-metaphysical one. The ontological weight of the object, and with it that of the act, which is the only one to count as 'apprehensive,' remains hidden for him." ("Der Phänomenologe, sofern er bei der Intention stehen bleibt, sieht nur die Hälfte des Phänomens—und zwar die unmetaphysische. Das ontologische Gewicht des Gegenstandes, und damit auch das des Aktes, der allein als 'erfassender' gelten darf, bleibt ihm verborgen") (Hartmann 1949a, 107). According to Hartmann, with the phenomenologist's obliteration of the principle of consciousness, the distinction between the object as immanent and as transcendent certainly becomes irrelevant. Nevertheless, the obliteration of such a principle itself becomes problematic, because it also denies the empirical fact of error and illusion, and our consciousness of them. Hartmann rejects the phenomenological confusion between the ontological transcendence of the *Gegenstand* and intentional immanence (the object as intended). As we will show, for him, the true status of the intentional object appears within the act of projection: the intentional object and its appearing horizon is the correlative pole of the subject's activity.

34. "Das seiende Subjekt steckt gleichsam um sich her durch die in ihm zusammenlaufenden Fäden der Erkenntnisrelation einen Teil der Seinssphäre als eine Objektsphäre ab; nichts mehr bedeutet der Hof der Objekte" (Hartmann 1949a, 206).



When there is true apprehension—and somehow there is always some amount of it in an ontological sense—the projected objectuality and the existing object partially coincide in their content. This projection turns out to be a concordant, objectively valid, representation of the object's being. By contrast, when the represented object does not coincide in its content with the existing one, the projection certainly has an objectual intentional content, but this intentional content is not objectively valid. If the object is not represented in concordance with its being, but instead is something that is only immanently coherent with the subject's thinking, a misrepresentation is projected onto the existent world. Hartmann gives a nod to phenomenology when he affirms that

all merely intentional objects belong, as such, to this projected world. From there comes their 'appearance' in the external world. But projection—whatever it may be—is not cognition; the projected object is not an object of cognition.<sup>35</sup>

The gnoseological representation should not be understood as something through which the subject immediately apprehends the object's being, but rather as something that, due to the persistence of previous subjective images, also distorts the world.<sup>36</sup> Personal and collective prejudices and assumptions are examples of intentional projections that misrepresent or distort the selfsistant world.

Hartmann shows in *Metaphysics of Cognition* that the existent world is not ontologically constituted by the intentional projection of the subject: the existence of error and illusion testifies to this. For him, the projectivity of the subject—its mode of representing the world—presupposes a selfsistant complex of ontological relations in which the projection occurs. It can be said, in a phenomenological way, that the subject projects its intentionally meaningful horizon of objects, but that this meaningful horizon is not the world itself. Instead, the Baltic-German philosopher claims that the represented-world, the

35. "Alle bloß intentionalen Gegenstände gehören als solche dieser projizierten Welt an. Daher ihr 'Erscheinen' in der Außenwelt. Aber Projektion—was sie auch sonst sein mag—ist nicht Erkenntnis, projizierter Gegenstand nicht Erkenntnisgegenstand" (Hartmann 1949a, 123).

36. It is not inaccurate to say that representation can be transparent (*durchsichtig*). Hartmann himself characterized it this way. In *Zur Grundlegung der Ontologie* he claims the following: "Image, representation, thinking are transparent, they 'do not confront'; only the theoretic-gnoseological reflection discovers them." (Bild, Vorstellung, Gedanke sind durchsichtig, sie 'stehen nicht gegen'; erst die erkenntnistheoretische Reflektion entdeckt sie) (Hartmann 1965, 143).

strictly closed content-sphere, which arises in all facets of relations, reflections, representations, and constitutes itself a counter-world [*Gegenwelt*] of the existing world, is the 'objective' contentful sphere of the knowing consciousness. Its inner aspect is consciousness itself.<sup>37</sup>

#### 6. ON THE SUBJECT'S GNOSEOLOGICALLY ECCENTRIC STANCE (*EXZENTRISCHE STELLUNG*)

Insofar as the process of cognition is developed by each empirical subject—and for Hartmann, there are only empirical subjects (Hartmann 1949a, 206)—the constitution of the world-representation will always be correlative to each cognizing subject. From the perspective of individual experience, the subject occupies a central position in each court of objects, because this court is in each case projected and delimited in line with the afterimage of individual subjects. Thus, the subject's situation is, apparently, as if it were, correlatively, the center of a surrounding world (*Umwelt*). However, from an ontological point of view, it can neither be said that the subject is at the center of the existent world nor that the world is correlative to the subject's projection. The central position of each subject in its own court of objects must not be confused with its position in the connections of being. In the first perspective, since the projection emerges from the subject and is constituted—in Heideggerian words—"for the sake of" its empirical interests, what appears in the sphere of experience is considered as a surrounding world. But if we consider the phenomena of error and illusion from the perspective of intersubjective experience, we can claim that each subject acknowledges the presence of its world-representation alongside other subjective projections. All the subjects coexist simultaneously projecting their own representation of the world and tend to believe in the objective validity of their representations of the common world. This situation is explained by Hartmann as follows:

The range of knowledge and the objectified region of being cannot be absolutely one and the same for different subjects. But, in general, the subjects live after all in a common object-world.<sup>38</sup>

37. "Streng geschlossene Inhaltssphäre, die in allseitiger Relation, Reflexion und Repräsentation entsteht und in sich eine Gegenwelt der seienden Welt bildet, ist die 'objektive' Inhaltssphäre des erkennenden Bewußtseins. Ihr Innenaspekt ist das Bewußtsein selbst" (Hartmann 1949a, 209).

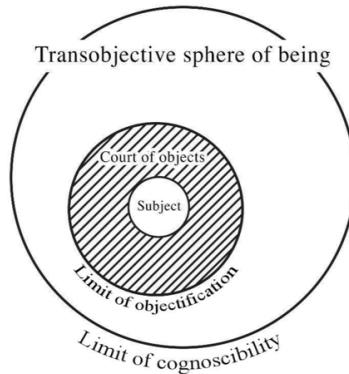
38. "Die Reichweite der Erkenntnis und der objizierte Ausschnitt aus dem Sein kann für verschiedene Subjekte nicht absolut ein und derselbe sein. Aber im allgemeinen leben die Subjekte doch in einer gemeinsamen Objektwelt" (Hartmann 1949a, 206).

On the basis of this remark, Hartmann puts forth in his *Metaphysics of Cognition* a conception of the human being's gnoseological situation according to which all empirical subjects have an *eccentric stance* (*exzentrische Stellung*) in a common sphere of being. He says:

the exact boundaries or circumference [of a certain central sphere] may well be different for each subject, and yet produce by its *eccentric stance*, so to speak, a *partial overlap* of each other.<sup>39</sup>

He sketches this subjective eccentric stance in a common world in the following diagram:<sup>40</sup>

Figure 1. The eccentric stance of the subject (Hartmann 1949a, 205)



As can be seen in Hartmann's diagram, the subject is not at the center of the transobjective sphere of being, but only at the center of its court of objects. Other subjects can easily be imagined, all with their courts

39. "Die genaueren Grenzen oder Umkreise desselben [eine gewisse zentrale Sphäre] können deswegen sehr wohl für jedes Subjekt andere sein und gleichsam bei *exzentrischer Stellung* zu einander dennoch *partiale Deckung* ergeben" (Hartmann 1949a, 206–07).

40. Regarding the concept of the subject's *eccentric stance*, we would like to express our partial disagreement with Joachim Fischer when he claims that Hartmann did not coin this concept but only contributed to its later formulation by Helmuth Plessner (Fischer 2011, 87). It is evident that Hartmann discovered the eccentric stance of subjects and the gnoseological consequences of it in his *Metaphysics of Knowledge*. Because of that early discovery, Hartmann was probably more receptive to Plessner's analysis, and the Plessnerian appropriation of that concept, in *Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch* (1928). Thus, it would be more accurate to say that, in *Das Problem des geistigen Seins*, Hartmann reformulated a concept that he himself had originally coined and that Plessner had improved in his major work.

of objects partially overlapping with those of the others and all of them having an eccentric stance in the transobjective sphere of being. The diagram reveals Hartmann's conception of the gnoseologically eccentric stance produced by the coexistence of multiple subjects within a common world. By taking the Hartmannian diagram further, we could claim that in the intersubjective gnoseological experience each subject can be fully aware of the difference between the transobjective world and the different world-objectifying projections. Errors and illusions are openly contested in intersubjective experience, while disputing the objective validity of their representations of the world: i.e., their concordance (*Übereinstimmung*) with the world's selfsistance. In the process of intersubjectively contrasting world-representations, subjects can acknowledge that the existent world, because of its selfsistance, is not simply as they take it to be.

We appeal to the intersubjective gnoseological experience because, although an individual subject can try to correct the immanent coherence of its representation of the world, it can nonetheless remain trapped in the illusion of what makes sense only to itself. The subjective coherence of a world image is not a decisive criterion of its objective validity. And, since the object of knowledge, the selfsistant world, remains indifferent to its subjective representation, the subject is prone to fall into the trap of self-referentiality. These are the gnoseological conditions for the idealistic view in which the subject occupies a centric stance. But, by paying attention to intersubjective experience, it is visible that, since the relation between subjects does not imply the same indifference of the object with regards to the subject, all the subjects continuously find themselves disputing the objective validity of their representations of the world. Intersubjective disputes over the validity of world representations prevent subjective self-referentiality from distorting the world. The acknowledgement of the eccentric gnoseological stance makes it possible for us to orient ourselves towards the world and discover its selfsistant ontological connections. Objectivity is the form of transcendence that cognition makes possible. This gnoseological transcendence is only possible as an intersubjective task.

## 7. CONCLUSION

The ontological projects of Heidegger and Hartmann both start from the common idea that knowledge does not give us access to the world for the first time. For both thinkers, to claim that it does so is to grant undue privilege to theoretical over other forms of human activity. Against this perspective, both philosophers re-evaluate experience by conceiving knowledge as a secondary activity. In Heidegger's case, this re-evaluation is given

through the concept of facticity; in Hartmann's, it is given through the understanding of apprehension as an act submerged in the fabric of experience. But their thoughts bifurcate from that point onwards. Whereas for Heidegger the world is constituted in correlation with the interpretative practical behavior of *Dasein*—the world is the surrounding horizon of meaning that exists only in correlation with *Dasein*'s understanding of being—Hartmann's intention is to affirm the selfsistance and independence of the world from the subject. In Hartmann's thought, the relation of knowledge offers evidence as to the independence of the world, since it shows that the world is not modified by our knowledge of it—in other words, that the subject does not constitute the world, but only its image of the world. In contrast, for Heidegger there is no distinction between world and knowing (understanding), because the world is always correlated with interpretative projection; the selfsistance of the world is just another possible meaning for understanding.

In what follows, I present a criticism directed against Heidegger from Hartmann's perspective. This criticism is not intended to claim that the latter's stance is more accurate than the Heideggerian one. Moreover, the purpose is to point out some aspects that should be re-examined in the context of metaphysical considerations pertaining to cognition—that is to say, considerations in which the distinction between what one thinks about the world and the world itself makes sense—with a view to sketching some new possible approaches to ontology.

Thus, the first questionable aspect in Heidegger's approach is the fact that he erases the differences between the horizon of *Dasein*'s understanding and the selfsistant existing world in which that horizon is projected. This is, in Hartmann's words, a reduction of the world itself to the court of objects delimited by each subject, or each *Existenz*. In this sense, what we can encounter in Heidegger's approach is a case of giving ontological-idealistic status to consciousness's meaningful projectivity, but in a phenomenological-hermeneutical fashion (the horizon of being's understanding).

Secondly, Heidegger's critique of Hartmann's position in respect of the latter's traditional conception of the subject-object relation is inaccurate because, as has been shown, Hartmann never conceived of the subject as enclosed in their sphere of consciousness. On the contrary, Hartmann includes the subject in a manifold of ontological relations, through which the subject is linked to the entities of the world. In his thought, subject and object, while both selfsistant, belong to a common sphere of being. For that reason, it is possible for the object to determine the subject in the relation of cognition. With his description of knowledge as embedded in a complex

sphere of being, Hartmann overcomes the false idealist problem of how consciousness could go outside of itself, and accounts for the possibility of the object's gnoseological efficacy *vis a vis* the subject. These ideas play a decisive role when it comes to Hartmann's later ontology as developed in *Zur Grundlegung der Ontologie*.

A third questionable aspect of Heidegger's approach is his idea that the existential projection (*Entwurf*) inherent to *Dasein*'s understanding of being is the "essential discoverer" of entities as they are. It is questionable because this implies that an entity's appearance is the same as its being. Heidegger claims that

Being (not entities) is something which "there is" only in so far as truth is. And truth is only insofar as and as long as *Dasein* is. Being and truth "are" equiprimordially. (Heidegger 1962, 272)

However, this is to confuse the self-sistent being of the objects with the meaningful appearance of objects. From a Hartmannian perspective, the representation of the world—which, in Heideggerian terms, could be identified with the hermeneutic structure of meaning—is not only an uncovering, but also a distorting structure of the world. Thus, it must be claimed that the Heideggerian existential concept of meaning (that for which something appears as something) offers neither an adequate explanation of the gnoseological phenomena of error and illusion nor an adequate criterion for the objective validity of understanding. The fact that we understand something is insufficient to explain our entire experience of truth and concordance with what exists and occurs. Because of this, Heidegger is forced to explain error by resorting to existential phenomena such as falling (*Verfallen*): error (*Irre*) is *Existenz*'s self-interpretation stemming from an entity that it is not. But, from Hartmann's perspective, this Heideggerian existential explanation can only be a misleading account of gnoseological phenomena.

The fourth and decisive questionable aspect of Heidegger's approach is his attempt to reject the ontological structure of the subject-object relation. Heidegger fails to grasp the manifest empirical conditions made possible by the ontological relation of subject and object. His analytics of *Existenz* interprets the attitude of knowledge in advance of this as being derived from daily practical behavior, as if there were no daily gnoseological activity, no daily grasping of what occurs in the world. In this sense, Heidegger forgets that knowledge, despite its secondary character, is a determining element of experience. Because of this, he overlooks the fact that projection (either as *Projektion* or as *Entwurf*) is really an ontologically hybrid

structure through which we experience the differences between the world as we see it and the world as it is. The subject-object ontic relation is the fact of knowledge *qua* its being embedded in the whole complex of ontological relations. Understanding is not possible without a form of cognition. Insofar as the empirical subject is already a knowing subject, the subject-object relation is also originally determinative for facticity.

Heidegger's conception of both being and cognition remains idealistic and anthropocentric. His concept of "being-knowable," as one among other discoverable meanings of being, has an idealistic connotation: all the meanings of being are dependent on the existential projection of *Dasein*.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, when he states that existential projection is always the discoverer of meaningful entities, and that the constitution of meaning is for the sake of *Dasein*'s being, this implies an anthropocentric perspective. The Hartmannian conception of the subject-object relation reveals, in contrast, an intersubjectively eccentric perspective, which accounts for the phenomena that we observe in our everyday experience of the world in a more natural and comprehensive way.

The Hartmannian idea of an eccentric stance shows that the subject's proper ontological *locus* is not at the center of the world, and that the world exists in a selfsistant and independent way. The subject is not a Being-in-the-world, but a being *of* the world. When subjects acknowledge each other within a common transobjective world, they no longer conceive of the world in a self-referential form. The decentralization of the subject makes possible a reorientation of consciousness: instead of linking each entity to the horizon of meaning, the subject reorients itself towards the world as such. Thus, the eccentric stance implies, on the one hand, that the subject acknowledges that the world does not exist for the sake of human beings and, on the other hand, that the subject's representation can also conceal the world's own being. Accordingly, to genuinely discover the world is, through constant decentralization, to free it from the bounds of subjective projection or, more specifically, from distorting subjective prejudices. A few years later, in his treatise *Das Problem des geistigen Seins*, Hartmann

41. On this matter, Pineda's reading of the *Black Notebooks* suggests that Heidegger was fully aware of this subjective-anthropocentric resonance connected with his ideas in *Being and Time*. The reason for this lies in the transcendental perspective that Heidegger assumed in those years. However, in the late 1920s he began a reassessment of his own theses, for which the starting point was the abandonment of the transcendental view. This led Heidegger to consider the fundamentality of being's pre-understanding not as a possession of humans, but as an event (*Ereignis*) that takes places in human existence (Pineda 2024, 43, 61).

described the transcendent capacity of knowledge to unconceal the world's being in the following terms:

For concealing is not in the essence of the thing, it does not show resistance to the penetration of knowledge. Only the human conceals it—through his prejudices. If he removes them in selfless work, then the thing lies free in front of him. This is the meaning of ἀλήθεια (unconcealment), which is involved in every effort of knowledge.<sup>42</sup>

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42. "Denn im Wesen der Sache liegt es nicht, sich zu verbergen, sie wehrt sich nicht gegen das Eindringen der Erkenntnis. Nur der Mensch verbirgt sie sich—durch seine Vorurteile. Räumt er diese in hingebender Arbeit hinweg, so liegt die Sache frei vor ihm. Diese ist der Sinn der ἀλήθεια (Unverborgenheit), um die es in allem Einsatz der Erkenntnis geht" (Hartmann 1949b, 389–90).



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# 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup>

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."<sup>3</sup>

In connection with the predominant contemporaneous historical-genetic direction of Hegelian research inaugurated by Dilthey's "fine *Jugendgeschichte Hegels*,"<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>5</sup> 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).<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup>

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.”<sup>8</sup> 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.<sup>9</sup>

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.<sup>10</sup>

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).”<sup>11</sup> 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.<sup>12</sup>

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.”<sup>13</sup>

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.”<sup>14</sup> 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).<sup>15</sup>

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.”<sup>16</sup>

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.”<sup>17</sup> 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.”<sup>18</sup>

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.”<sup>19</sup> 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.<sup>20</sup>

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.<sup>21</sup>

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).<sup>22</sup> 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 18<sup>th</sup>–21<sup>st</sup>, 1931). The conference was organized by the “International Hegel-Association” (*Internationaler Hegel-Bund*), founded on April 24<sup>th</sup>, 1930, with Richard Kroner as president and Julius Binder as vice-president, and was, together with the conferences in Haag (April 22<sup>nd</sup>–25<sup>th</sup>, 1930) and Rome (April 19<sup>th</sup>–23<sup>rd</sup>, 1933), the second of three international Hegel conferences.<sup>23</sup> 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.<sup>24</sup>

“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)<sup>25</sup> 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 16<sup>th</sup>, 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.<sup>26</sup>

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.<sup>27</sup>

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.<sup>28</sup>

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).<sup>29</sup> 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.<sup>30</sup>

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.<sup>31</sup> 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.<sup>32</sup>

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."<sup>33</sup> 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.<sup>34</sup>

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.<sup>35</sup>

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."<sup>36</sup> 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."<sup>37</sup>

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."<sup>38</sup> 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."<sup>39</sup> 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.<sup>40</sup>

In Hegel, “actuality” (*Wirklichkeit*) does not coincide with mere “concrete existence” (*Existenz*), but rather with the “realization of an ideal element.”<sup>41</sup> 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.”<sup>42</sup> In Hegel, in fact, “it is not the elementary categories that dominate, but rather the complex, higher ones.”<sup>43</sup>

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.<sup>44</sup>

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."<sup>45</sup>

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.<sup>46</sup>

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).<sup>47</sup>

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."<sup>48</sup> 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).

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# Nicolai Hartmann's Concept of Critique\*


*Bianka Boros*

**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.<sup>1</sup> 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),<sup>2</sup> 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*),<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup>

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,"<sup>5</sup> 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."<sup>6</sup>

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."<sup>7</sup>

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)<sup>8</sup>

Hartmann advocates an attitude based on the Copernican counter-revolution. This attitude, which stems from natural realism<sup>9</sup>, 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.<sup>10</sup>

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).<sup>11</sup> 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)."<sup>12</sup> 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."<sup>13</sup> 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.”<sup>14</sup>

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.<sup>15</sup>

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."<sup>16</sup>

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.”<sup>17</sup> 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.”<sup>18</sup> 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.<sup>19</sup>

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."<sup>20</sup> 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."<sup>21</sup>

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").<sup>22</sup> It also coincides with the descriptive method of research on categories.<sup>23</sup> 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.<sup>24</sup> Phenomenology as the first stage is not understood here merely chronologically, but also in the sense that phenomena weigh heavier than theory.<sup>25</sup> 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.<sup>26</sup> 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).<sup>27</sup> 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 uninterruptedly, and proves that the synthesis is a merely apparent unity (Hartmann 2012, 350).

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# Echoes of Nicolai Hartmann in Czech Philosophy

*Miloš Kratochvíl*

**ABSTRACT** The aim of this article is to follow the echoes and incorporation of Nicolai Hartmann's ideas in Czech philosophy. For the purpose of showing the variety of philosophical fields influenced by Hartmann, I have selected the systems of four Czech philosophers: Ferdinand Pelikán, Vladimír Hoppe, Jan Blahoslav Kozák, and Vladimír Kubeš. In his attempt to clarify noetic problems, Pelikán paid most of his attention to *Grundzüge einer Metaphysik der Erkenntnis*. Hoppe created one of the most complete philosophical systems in the history of Czech philosophy, where the notion of intuition plays a key role. Hartmann's ethics is also treated and assessed by J.B. Kozák. And, in the last part of this chapter, I show the echo of Hartmann's philosophy in the ontology of law of Vladimír Kubeš. I show that Hartmann's ideas have not only been adopted in various modifications throughout the history of Czech philosophy, but that they have also been criticized.

**KEYWORDS** Czech philosophy; Hartmann, Nicolai; Kozák, Jan Blahoslav; Kubeš, Vladimír; Hoppe, Vladimír; Pelikán, Ferdinand

## 1. INTRODUCTION

“As a whole, Hartmann’s philosophy is some kind of extended, modernized and deepened positivism.”<sup>1</sup> This statement concludes Jan Patočka’s philosophical portrait of Nicolai Hartmann published in *Česká mysl* (*Czech Thought*) in 1942. What does this surprising association of positivism with the author of one of the most influential ontologies rooted in phenomenology tell us? Is it supposed to be a compliment or a criticism? Is the purpose of such a statement to make us reflect upon both Hartmann’s philosophy and positivism? Although decidedly short, Patočka’s article, which was written and published on the occasion of Hartmann’s jubilee, was for a long time the only text introducing and summarizing the latter’s philosophy to the Czech philosophical community. Nevertheless, the echoes of Hartmann in Czech philosophy are more numerous. The aim of this article is to pursue these, and to show how some of Hartmann’s ideas were incorporated into the systems of four Czech philosophers: Ferdinand Pelikán, Vladimír Hoppe, Jan Blahoslav Kozák and Vladimír Kubeš. The contemporary Czech philosophers Otakar Funda and Josef Šmajš, who were strongly influenced by Hartmann, will be discussed in a separate article.

The first of Hartmann’s books to have drawn the attention of Czech philosophers appears to have been *Grundzüge einer Metaphysik der Erkenntnis*, published in 1921. Before the 1920s, Hartmann was, at least according to Patočka, the most gifted candidate of the Marburg Neo-Kantian School. He approached Plato’s philosophy in spirit, which he interpreted as a theory or logic of being. However, at the turn of the 1910s and 1920s, he committed, to use Patočka’s words, a “spectacular apostasy,” by turning away from Marburgian idealism towards the other side: namely, that of realism.

## 2. FERDINAND PELIKÁN

The longest and most intensive controversy in the history of Czech philosophy was that between positivism and idealism.<sup>2</sup> The philosophers on the

1. “V celku lze říci, že Hartmannova nauka je jakýsi rozšířený, modernisovaný, prohloubený pozitivismus” (Patočka 1942, 47).

2. “Czech idealism” is a name for the philosophers who founded the journal *Ruch filosofický* in 1921. It was a rather heterogeneous group of philosophers opposed to positivism. Czech positivism, meanwhile, was the dominant philosophy in the first decades of the twentieth century, and differed from French positivism as well as from English positivism. The term “idealism” was used by the most energetic Czech positivist František Krejčí to name all non-positivist philosophies. His classification of philosophical conceptions made reference to the knowability of the transcendent. To simplify, we can say that he distinguished four possible standpoints: (1) knowledge of the transcendent is possible and necessary for our worldview, (2) knowledge of the transcendent is possible but not necessary for our worldview, (3)

idealist side reacted rather strongly to Hartmann's philosophy. One of them, Ferdinand Pelikán, although he did not create a complete philosophical system, played a significant role in the development of Czech philosophy. At first, he was influenced by Neo-Kantianism (he studied under the supervision of Wilhelm Windelband) and conducted a study of Hans Vaihinger's perspective on the nature of scientific knowledge and its philosophical foundations in the works of Hume and Kant. He was the author of one of the very first Czech texts about Hartmann: namely, an extensive review of *Grundzüge einer Metaphysik der Erkenntnis* (Pelikán 1924). Naturally, he mostly stressed those topics in which he himself was interested. For him, Hartmann's book constituted a noetic challenge. Pelikán characterized it as "aporetical." According to him, Hartmann's book was aporetical in the skeptical meaning of the term. He found only a few positive assertions therein, and concluded that Hartmann's philosophy was a kind of skepticism. This skepticism, he thought, overshadowed its ontological aspect.

The major aporia of this work, according to Pelikán, is that of the possibility of the knowability of the object. The object is, by its nature, in relation to a subject, transcendent. This aporia entails two antitheses. Either an object is knowable thanks to the subject's capacity for crossing the transcendental gap, i.e., on account of its ability to step outside of itself—or a subject does not have this capability, and experiences only its own contents and ideas. For Pelikán, the question of the awareness of the difference between a mere image and a transcendent object is a key philosophical problem. How do we know that we do not know everything, or that we do not know properly? Is there something else besides the subject and the object? Pelikán liked Hartmann's idea that there is a realm of trans-objectivity, whose border is movable in that new beings can become objects (which also makes the progress of knowledge possible). However, this realm, according to Pelikán, is not unknowable. The concept

knowledge of the transcendent is not possible but necessary for our worldview, (4) knowledge of the transcendent is not possible and not necessary for our worldview. The first standpoint sets up the task for philosophy, which is to provide the method of grasping the transcendent. In the second standpoint, there is no need for philosophy at all. If the transcendent is knowable, it is knowable by science, according to the positivist. The third one also leaves no space for philosophy and leads to mysticism and religion. The fourth one indicates the task of philosophy, which is to provide a worldview without reference to the transcendent. In summary, philosophy can only be positivism or idealism (i.e., non-positivism) (Krejčí 1930, 8). It is in this sense that I use the term "idealism." The term "worldview" ("světový názor") corresponds to the German word *Weltanschauung*. Worldviews were a major topic in the Czech philosophy of the end of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth century, not only in positivism and idealism but also for Tomáš Masaryk and the early Patočka.

of “the Unknowable” was popular among the Czech positivists (especially in Krejčí 1904), who borrowed this term from Herbert Spencer (1862, Part I). Pelikán tried to avoid positivist skepticism. He thought that avoiding skepticism was also one of Hartmann’s goals. But, according to Pelikán, although Hartmann described and analyzed the problems of skepticism very well, he nevertheless failed to overcome them. Many times, Pelikán compared Hartmann’s arguments with those of the ancient skeptics, who believed that one vainly searches for the criterion of truth (vainly, because searching for such a criterion leads to aporias—either the criterion is in our consciousness and does not pertain to the objects or it is in the objects and does not relate to our consciousness), and to Plato’s considerations about the possible knowledge that there is something that we do not know (Pelikán 1929, 104).

Pelikán’s aim is to find out how the trans-objective can be objectivized, and how we can know about our ignorance of something. According to him, the aporia of knowing our ignorance is a partial aporia, for it involves the intention of overcoming such a limit. Hartmann considers *a priori* knowledge to be aporetic as well. For even in this case one can ask how an inner experience can lead to the knowledge of essences, and how we can even know and have certainty that what we have grasped via such an intuition corresponds to outer reality. Pelikán appreciates that Hartmann removed the “centennial preconception” to the effect that *a priori* knowledge must be of an exclusively rational character. He assumed that principles or laws of being can be irrational as well. Along with Hartmann, he stresses the role of the irrational, which enables one to connect the theory of knowledge with ontology. But, nonetheless, the notion of the irrational carries with it an aporia as well—something which can also be encountered in Kant’s philosophy. Another centennial preconception, present in the history of philosophy, is that “reason should grasp being in its completeness” (Pelikán 1929, 114). However, unlike Kant, Hartmann, according to Pelikán, does not consider the immanence of knowledge and the concept of the thing-in-itself to be the peak of rationality, but rather the exact opposite. Hartmann puts being above rationality and, consequently, ontology above the theory of knowledge.<sup>3</sup>

3. “Imanenci myšlení, která resultuje ze vztahovačnosti ratio k irracionálnímu, nelze zaměnit za imanenci poznání, jak chtěl Kant ve své věci o sobě, která mu byla vrcholem racionality. V Hartmannově ontologické revoluci, jak on říká, jest jsoucno nadřazeno rozumu” (Pelikán 1929, 114–15).



As a representative of Czech idealism (emphasizing, in a Bergsonian manner, the spontaneous creativity of the human mind), Pelikán was impressed with Hartmann's considerations about conceptual constructions and the ways in which the mind fixates, albeit tentatively and hypothetically, on what will later become knowledge. There is an activity of the mind that consists in the creation of notions; such activity is a sort of anticipation, of projection (Pelikán 1929, 116). According to Hartmann, concepts are hypothetical representations of (otherwise) ungraspable essences. And the realm of the unknowable, the irrational, or—as Pelikán and the other Czech idealists put it—the Absolute, is exactly what modern philosophy seeks. For the Czech idealists, positivism was the philosophy of the past, not having any future, while modern philosophy was, first of all, Bergsonism and other like-minded schools searching for new, non-scientific ways of knowledge leading to the Absolute.

According to both Hartmann and Pelikán, the mistake of Kantian philosophy consisted in the prejudice that reason imposes its laws onto nature. For them, however, reason tries to imitate or eventually grasp its object, but does not create it. Critical ontology can only be a realist ontology. Here, Pelikán took note of what would later become Hartmann's most famous idea—i.e., that of the layered structure of being—and compared Hartmann's philosophy with that of Émile Boutroux, who proposed a similar theory of levels of reality in *De la contingence des lois de la nature* (1874).

Pelikán assessed the consequences of Hartmann's aporetics rather negatively: "Aporetics can perhaps formulate the old philosophical issues in a better way, but it can hardly solve them. It can perhaps refine and deepen critical methods, but, in the end, it stands helplessly in front of confused complexes of new mysteries calling for deeper psychological description" (Pelikán 1929, 124). This helplessness becomes evident not only in the inner disharmony of Hartmann's book, but also in the absence of positive answers, which are, according to Pelikán, not even present as hints. Despite the fact that Hartmann did admit of a kind of intuition in *Metaphysik der Erkenntnis*,<sup>4</sup> Pelikán accuses Hartmann of failing to take into consideration intuitions and emotions in the process of arriving at knowledge. Strongly influenced by Bergson, he sees in such faculties ways to break the limits of (un)knowability and loosen the rational and methodological shackles of the human mind. Briefly put, he holds, perhaps wrongly, that Hartmann "crossed out the emotional and volitional aspect completely and understood

4. On Hartmann's account of intuition, see (Hartmann 1921, 327–30).

the subject only as consciousness, as a passive, purely receptive reservoir of intellectual contents” (Pelikán 1929, 124).

### 3. VLADIMÍR HOPPE

Much stronger reactions to Hartmann’s philosophy, especially to his critical ontology, can be found in the works of Vladimír Hoppe, another representative of Czech idealism and author of the most comprehensive philosophical system of interwar Czech philosophy. What drew Hoppe’s attention to Hartmann was, presumably, his *Ethik*. Hoppe does not mention Hartmann in his major work *Přirozené a duchovní základy světa a života* (*Natural and Spiritual Foundations of the World and Life*) (Hoppe 1925), but he did publish a review of Hartmann’s *Ethik* (1926) in *Ruch filosofický* in 1928. His assessment of *Ethik* is manifest from the very title of the review: “Pozoruhodné dílo z oboru etiky” (“A Noteworthy Work in the Field of Ethics”) (Hoppe 1928a). Naturally, in *Ethik* Hoppe is looking for—and finds—ideas corresponding to his own conceptions of human beings, knowledge and values. Nevertheless, like Pelikán, who criticized Hartmann’s metaphysics of knowledge, he criticizes Hartmann’s ethics for its agnosticism and lack of positive statements.

One of the main objectives of Hoppe’s philosophy is to transcend the limits of rational knowledge. He believes that this objective can be reached, but that philosophy is ultimately unable to reach the core of truth. Whereas the sciences are concerned with empirically observable reality, absolute values remain out of their reach. The aim of his philosophy is to find ways of accessing the realm of the absolute. As he says, “by restoring intuition and contemplation, I am trying . . . to descend as deep as the pre-experiential conditions of the spirit and thus also of the world. I am thereby trying to rediscover the immediate contact with the absolute world of ideas” (Hoppe 1928b, 152). The purpose of philosophy is thus to raise mankind from the lower, material categories to the higher, spiritual ones—from the world of phenomena to the world of values. Material interests must be subordinate to the latter. The focal point of our interest is to turn from the outer towards the inner world. Thus, philosophy is primarily metaphysics, and metaphysics is in fact a project, a utopia, the study of the totality of what “ought to be.” For him, philosophy deals with what ought to be, with values rather than facts, and science is unsuitable for this purpose, for it is only concerned with the observation of phenomena (Hoppe 1922, 4).

However, in the realm of spiritual reality, we are not concerned with observations of any kind (not even with introspection), but exclusively with the direct, unmediated (whether by the senses or by reason) experience

of essences. It is impossible to quantify the intensity of spiritual phenomena (e.g., memories, sorrows, pleasures). For that reason, such immediate experiences are excluded from scientific investigations.<sup>5</sup>

Philosophy, therefore, tries to grasp essences by means of intuition, whereas the sciences, which intentionally leave out objects and their qualities, in fact deny the very reality that, consequently, cannot be known by them. Science deals with static symbols. As Hoppe says, “physics is the science of matter without matter; biology is the science of life without life; psychology is the science of the soul without soul.”<sup>6</sup> In other words, science does not get to know what matter, life and souls are. According to Hoppe, this is not just a mistake or a lack of knowledge: it is a denial of our own spiritual reality, of moral values, and of the meaning of life. He believed that the worldview of modern human beings amounted to a nihilism whereby conflict and the will to power are conceived as the movers of progress, and that the practical culmination of such nihilism was the Great War.

Hoppe claims that there is a specific type of philosophical knowledge that differs essentially from the scientific sort.<sup>7</sup> It has its source in the spirit. The scientific postulate of causality is replaced with that of purpose. The postulate of purpose does not limit the life of the spirit to causal connections, but opens up the possibilities for free creation generally (Hoppe 1922, 14). This was the common goal of all of the Czech idealists, and we can say that their programme was to free the human spirit from the chains of (scientific) methods—or, in other words, to defeat positivism by highlighting its sterility. However, this does not mean that all these idealists were anti-science. Some of them were scientists themselves. For example, Karel Vorovka was a mathematician, influenced by Henri Poincaré’s epistemology, who saw in mathematics many testimonies to the creative nature of science and the human mind (Vorovka 1917).

An important topic for Hoppe was the Kantian metaphor of the Copernican Revolution in philosophy which, generally, was intensively discussed in the philosophy of the nineteenth century. According to Hoppe, the

5. Apart from the evident Bergsonian traces, we must also recall that one of the main battlefields of the idealism-positivism controversy was the question of the possibility of scientific psychology. The positivists said that “metaphysics, already being expelled out of the natural sciences, crept into psychology. . . . The idealists now combat positivism with psychology and persistently prevent its scientification” (Krejčí 1930, 41).

6. “Fysika jest vědou o hmotě bez hmoty, biologie jest vědou o životě bez života, psychologie vědou o duši bez duše” (Hoppe 1922, 6).

7. This view was not exceptional in Western philosophy at that time: we might mention Bergsonian philosophy and phenomenology, to name just the most influential and enduring approaches.

Copernican Revolution does not necessarily lead to solipsism, but forces us to rethink the aims of philosophy. As he writes

Our personality is pulled out of the limited realm of bare physical life by this sudden opportunity to replace the categorial order of the rigid world of quantities with the unlimited supra-individual sphere of qualities, and thus embedded in the unlimited creative realm of spiritual life. (Hoppe 1922, 18)

Such philosophy takes the subject into consideration, for it does not reduce human experience to phenomena and it does not explain the superior by the inferior. This position distinguishes philosophy from positivism and science, which both lead to nihilism. Hoppe opposes his philosophy, which he calls a “positive spiritual philosophy,” to nihilism, and wants to fight the latter by means of the former. His starting point is the spiritual abilities of the human mind, which are subsequently projected onto unknown objects.

Hoppe revised Comte’s law of three stages into one consisting of four stages. The first, according to him, is the stage of intuitive knowledge, which corresponds more or less to what Comte called the theological stage.

The second is the stage of negative philosophy (with its objective analysis), which corresponds more or less to what Comte called positive philosophy. It comprises the positive, scientific worldview, characterized by agnosticism regarding the possibility of the cognition of causes and essences.<sup>8</sup>

The third is a period of marked discontent with the nihilism and relativism of the previous, scientific, objective stage. This third stage is characterized by an appreciation both of the creative capabilities of the subject and of the fact that the world is its representation, and that the representation is a germ of reality. It is not just a new degree: the preceding stage contains no anticipations of it. It is completely novel, and a turning point. In the preceding stage—i.e., that of negative philosophy (or positivism, in Comte’s terms)—any cases of introjection of a subject into an object, intuition, hypostatized consciousness, etc., amount to gross mistakes and epistemological failures. According to Hoppe, Kant realized this better than Comte. But still, Kant on the one hand is an agnostic, but on the other postulates the thing in itself and the moral laws. Indeed, not only does he postulate

8. We cannot go into details here when it comes to showing that Hoppe equated positivism only with the first phase of Comte’s career. The second phase of his career was more connected with subjective synthesis than with objective analysis. However, Hoppe understood positivism as a form of materialism and scientism, which is far from the Comtean conception of it.

them, but he also makes positive statements about them. It is exactly Kant's compromising point of view that called for a solution, and the philosophy of the nineteenth century was full of such attempts. There seems to be a kind of agreement between Hoppe and Hartmann on this subject.<sup>9</sup> For Hoppe, when Kant said that we cannot know anything about the thing-in-itself, this was already a positive assertion, or maybe even knowledge concerning the latter (with respect to its existence and its unknowability, at least).

The fourth and highest stage is that of positive spiritual philosophy. Here we are

by the supra-individual spheres of our personality in direct contact with the spiritual creative cosmos . . . At this stage of positive spiritual knowledge, gnosis, the difference between subject and object disappears. (Hoppe 1922, 28)

Hoppe sometimes describes this stage as a direct contact with God. Kant's scientific orientation (and his epistemology reflecting it) prevented him from reaching these spheres, while Hegel and Schopenhauer came much closer. This is the reason why Hoppe was so impressed by Hartmann's considerations regarding the irrationality of metaphysical issues and the methods used to investigate them. There is always a certain portion of irrationality in metaphysics; there is always something rationally unknowable. And the closer we get to this, the more we realize the deficiencies of reason (Hoppe 1928a, 74).

The implication for ethics is that values cannot be rationally deduced, and are a matter of intuition. Hoppe was worried about ethical subjectivism, and he detected this concern also in Hartmann's texts. For both philosophers, ethics had to be a science of objectively valid laws, and was irreducible to subjective activities. He also agreed with Hartmann, however, that it would be impossible without a subject. For only the subject can realize an obligation, or transform it into a reality. Moreover, ethics is essentially teleological, and its *telos* lies in the realm of the irrational. Yet the decisions

9. "Hardly less mistaken, but less crude, is the argument that claims to be supported by Kant (c., 1). The constitution of the 'thing-in-itself' is unknowable. This claim stands solidly on Kantian soil. We could also add, if need be, that at best its *Dasein* is knowable. Hence, only a cognitive boundary is drawn between *Dasein* and *Sosein*, not an ontological boundary. The things-in-themselves also have their determinacy and do not stand there in diffuse indeterminacy, and Kant leaves no doubt about this. He clearly does not conflate being and being cognizable. The idea of unknowable things in themselves shows this unequivocally" (Hartmann 2019, 112).

made by a subject in everyday life are always made on the basis of something known. Hoppe, probably under the influence of Kant, denied that this basis could be anything *a posteriori*. That is why he assumes that it is necessary to analyze what he calls the “*a priori* levels of our personality” (1928a, 75). Moral obligations originate from these levels, and it is from there that they guide our behavior in the empirical domain.

Although Hoppe is influenced by Kant, he also believes that Kantian philosophy lacks an acceptable explanation of the origin of this practical *a priori*, which any kind of ethical apriorism entails, including that of Hartmann. However, Hartmann’s notion of axiological intuition is very close to that of Hoppe, for whom intuition is a key concept.<sup>10</sup>

As a representative of Czech idealism, Hoppe is in many respects close to the philosophy of František Mareš. In fact, Mareš (the spiritual father of the Czech idealists and a sharp critic of Tomáš Masaryk, as well as of positivism) adhered to idealistic views inspired by biology. It was he who claimed that values are objects of intuition, out of reach of science, because there is no place for intuition in the latter (Mareš 1901, 293). Moreover, he considers truth to be something higher than reality, holding that truth is not something that simply “is,” but rather something that “ought to be.” One shall not pursue truth; it shall rather be put into practice. For him, truth is not an epistemological category but an ethical one (Mareš 1918, 85). The fact that Hartmann’s ethics is very close to this conception (at least in its outline) is the reason why Hoppe viewed it positively.<sup>11</sup>

According to this position, values are not real, but ideal. They are conditions for the possibility of the valuable; without values, nothing could be valuable. Valuable things are thus secondary, whereas values are primary. The valuables depend on a subject, whereas values do not. Values compel us to (co-)create reality on their basis. Thus, they assert themselves teleologically and they extend from the realm of the ideal to the realm of real

10. “Hartmann vyslovuje přesvědčení, že lze odhalit hodnoty toliko ziráci intuitivní metodou, kterážto metoda jest dnes v nepatrných začátcích” (Hoppe 1928a, 78). Hoppe is well aware that the intuitive method is only beginning to be understood. It is also understandable that it is one of the goals of his own philosophy, which he calls *an intuitive philosophy*.

11. “Není o tom pochyb, že v tom má Hartmann pravdu, dovozuje-li, že ‘stanovisko subjektu k mravním závazkům (Sollen) jest centrálním bodem v mravním problému’ – ‘subjekt jest silou reálného světa určující tendenci. On sám dovede ‘přeložit’ závazek v reálné bytí’” (Hoppe 1928a, 77). Hoppe here expresses his full agreement with Hartmann, citing the latter’s *Ethics*: “The attitude of the subject to the Ought is the central point in the ethical problem. . . . A personal subject is an entity which is capable of this tendency—and, so far as we can know, it is the only such entity in the world. It alone can introduce the Ought into existence” (Hartmann 1932, 261).

being, where they manifest themselves as moral principles whose bearers are human beings.

For Hoppe, moral phenomenon clearly shows how important the human role in the realization of values really is. There is no anthropocentrism involved at all. Humans create neither values nor objects. They themselves are neither accumulations of cosmic dust, nor mere phenomena amongst others, as the critical scientific position current at the time could be taken to suggest. Whereas the naïve anthropocentric view, and the scientific one, are like thesis and antithesis, ethics is like their synthesis. Human beings are mediators of values, bringing them into the world. Ethics is thus indivisible from anthropology. We often tend to forget this, but any ethical conception presupposes an anthropology, regardless of whether this is expressed explicitly, scientifically formulated, or merely implied. The place of human beings lies at the intersection of the ideal principle and the real world. Therefore, a human is always a restless, inclining, decision-making (and fallible) being (Hoppe 1928a, 77).

These considerations lead Hoppe to deal with another perennial philosophical topic: namely, that of human freedom as a necessary condition for moral phenomena. Hoppe refuses to discuss whether we are determined by causal or final determination, because in both cases it is a matter of determination. He agrees with those who claim that it is necessary to defend ethics against naturalism. However, he also believes that it is necessary to defend it against teleology. In fact, according to Hoppe, both of the above-mentioned tasks were quite successfully achieved by Kant. And yet, he thinks that Kant paid too high a price for his solution, in that he had to classify freedom among the antinomies of pure reason. In other words, he had to give up the possibility of a proof of freedom and admit that it is something unknowable and irrational. Hoppe believes that this is the point where our philosophical efforts should begin, not end. He sees this Kantian result also in the work of Hartmann. Although he admires the latter's ethics, he could not accept its agnostic assumptions. He finds Hartmann's *Ethik* encouraging for those who want to investigate for themselves, but not for those who expect clear answers.<sup>12</sup>

As to *Grundzüge einer Metaphysik der Erkenntnis*, Hoppe did not take this work into account until writing *Úvod do intuitivní a kontemplativní*

12. "N. Hartmann končí zde – jak jsme uvedli již shora – agnostickým doznáním, že metafysických předmětů nelze ani dokázat, ani vyvrátit. Irracionální zbytek, jež tyto problémy při řešení vždy vyžadují, zabraňuje, abychom postoupili k jejich konečnému rozřešení . . . I když s autorem nesouhlasíme, jsme jím podníceni k uvažování o oněch problémech a k prohlubování jich" (Hoppe 1928a, 79).

*filosofie (Introduction to Intuitive and Contemplative Philosophy)*, published in 1928. In this book, he returns to the idea of the Copernican Revolution and to the critical continuation of Kant. In contrast to his other texts, here we can find many references to Hartmann. Hoppe frequently highlights the aspect of human personality at the beginning of his texts. For him, the substantial part of personality is hidden from consciousness. But, apart from the unconscious and the subconscious,<sup>13</sup> Hoppe also speaks of the sphere of supraconsciousness. This is both the center and the source of creativity and freedom. If we reduced the human spirit to its conscious part, creativity and freedom would be eliminated:

If what *is* cannot be a model for what *ought to be*, the creative and spontaneous impulses coming from the unknown parts of our transcendental personality are sufficient evidence that our existence is not fully reducible to our little, empirical ego. (Hoppe 1928b, 108)

Hoppe describes the consequence of such a conception as follows:

The intuition of ideas or values as a permanent pattern of what is not, but what should be, therefore requires irrational methods . . . And this method, which reveals to us our most secret spiritual manifestations, i.e., ideals and values that are not within the reach of our consciousness, emerges directly from the creative subconscious, unconscious, and supraconscious potencies of our spirit. As this method can merge with the irrational individual details of any process, we call such a method, along with many other thinkers, an intuitive method. (1928b, 109)

Furthermore, Hoppe supplements this method, which makes it possible for us to “penetrate into the individual details of phenomena,” with a contemplative one. By means of this second irrational method, we shall have access to the irrational part of reality that contains moral values: i.e., what “ought to be.”

According to Hoppe, Kant’s Copernican Revolution in the direction of the subject is not fully realized. It remains just a project, due to the fact that Kant does not assume (or does not want to assume) that the subject is an irrational and creative one; he incorrectly assumes it to be rational. Kant

13. Hoppe was influenced by Eduard von Hartmann’s philosophy of the unconscious. Consequently, for him Freud’s theory is nothing else than a scientific confirmation and detailed elaboration of something that was already known.



thus remains a prisoner, not only of phenomenism, but also of agnosticism (regarding the irrational sphere of reality). He made room for faith while defining the faculties of reason. But Hoppe, who understands faith as an irrational source of knowledge, conceives of this as an unrealizable project. The Copernican Revolution could only be completed when the human spirit is perceived as a “pure irrational quality, free from any quantitative burden and capable of spontaneous production. Only if all such attributes of the human spirit were accepted would it be possible to think of realizing the Copernican Turn towards the subject” (Hoppe 1928b, 111). Therefore, much like Hartmann, Hoppe does not find it necessary to try to turn Kant in another direction. Hoppe wants to complete his project. As he says,

whenever we try to capture the irrational, whether it is the irrational of natural creation or the irrational which forms the basis of our actions—mere conceptual reasonings, as Kant would understand them, are insufficient . . . We must start with assumptions completely different from those of Kant. (1928b, 112)

Hoppe suspects that Kant would have been aware of the existence of the unconditioned irrational lying beyond phenomena, and that he sought to know it (both in epistemology and in ethics) but refused to depart from the solid ground of experience. The necessity of bridging the gap between necessity and freedom, between causality and finality, between body and mind, etc., leads Kant to some kind of monism of absolute spirit. According to Hoppe, Kant was oriented towards the Absolute, but his critical stance hindered him from getting closer to it. Yet he at least cleared the way to the accomplishing of that. Just like Hartmann, Hoppe sees a conflict between Kant’s rationalism and his admission of the existence of unconditioned and irrational elements (leaving room for ideas of pure reason).

As was common in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, the history of philosophy was not a branch of the history of thought, but rather a division of philosophy. Hoppe is no exception; he does not interpret the history of philosophy, but rather uses it. And, again, as was common then, he focuses his attention on contemporaneous philosophical systems. According to him, the overall aim of post-Kantian philosophy was to create a synthesis of the rational and irrational (a synthesis of what “is” and what “ought to be”). He had several reasons for considering Kant’s own attempt a failure. His criticism of the latter is partially derived from Hartmann. However, he finds Hartmann’s dialectical method to be insufficient, because in its particular form it cannot lead to the irrational. Yet a path

to the irrational is needed, especially in ethics (Hoppe 1928b, 284). Hoppe also finds the attempts of other post-Kantian philosophers to arrive at the irrational to be well executed, but to constitute no more than mere attempts.

In fact, according to Hoppe, none of the then contemporary philosophies had succeeded in furnishing the sought for synthesis of rationality and irrationality. Phenomenology did not provide it. Logicism had failed because it reduced knowledge to the study of propositions, and psychologism because it reduced it to cognitive functions. A false psychology leads to a false theory of knowledge and a false ethics. Regardless of whether the method of psychology is phenomenological or empirical, if we study only our own cognitive processes, the philosophy built on such a psychology is bound to remain very distant from any accomplishing of its own goal (namely, the synthesis). The ego must be conceived in much wider terms than as just an empirical or a transcendental one. Hoppe calls it the “great spiritual ego,”<sup>14</sup> and considers it to be the source of all spiritual life, which we need to turn to. This would be the true Copernican Revolution, in that this “great spiritual ego” not only comprises the transcendental consciousness, but also transcendental emotions. Hoppe supported his claims by relying on Hartmann’s notion of axiological intuition (Hoppe 1928b, 287).<sup>15</sup>

Hoppe does not think that the synthesis of the rational and the irrational is only a matter of noetics or ethics, as it might appear at first sight, but also a matter of ontology. After all, he believes that ontology is actually the main topic of Kant’s philosophy.<sup>16</sup> However, according to him, Kant’s analysis of conceptual thought is faulty. He thinks that the latter aims at the unconditioned, but without any irrational method. Kant’s attempt to synthesize the conditioned and the unconditioned is therefore bound to fail. All subsequent attempts in post-Kantian philosophy are less epistemological and more ontological (including phenomenology). As Hoppe presents it, Hartmann’s critical ontology is the latest, and so far the best, attempt to reach this goal.<sup>17</sup>

14. “Velké duchovní já” (Hoppe 1928b, 286).

15. “N. Hartmann jest přesvědčen, že hodnoty nelze racionálně neb rozumově odvoditi, nýbrž že je možno je toliko postřehnouti vnitřním zřením. Platonický motiv zírání se hodí znamenitě na to, co nazývá materiální etika procítěním hodnot (= Wert fühlen); na to tedy, co se jeví v činech jako zaujetí hlediska a schvalování smýšlení” (Hoppe 1928b, 287).

16. “The a priori conditions for possible experience as such are at the same time conditions for the possibility of objects of experience” (*Critique of Pure Reason*, A 111).

17. “V nejnovější době se pokusil o znovuvybudování ontologie na kritickém podkladě Nikolai Hartmann. Popatřme na jeho pozoruhodný pokus, abychom pak posoudili, zda se může znovu zroditi nová ontologie z ducha kriticizmu.” (Hoppe 1928b, 356). Examples of Hoppe’s evaluation of Hartmann: “Neobyčejně sympatický rys tohoto myslitele je třeba

Hoppe focuses on the objections which Hartmann put forward against traditional ontology. He finds the complaint that traditional ontology fails to clearly distinguish the three spheres of being (i.e., those of thought, ideal being and real being) to be the most important one. Another criticism shared by Hoppe is that the old ontology was aprioristic: i.e., that it assumed that real being could be grasped by means of reason. It was not until Kant that the question was asked whether we can grasp being through reason. Hoppe believes that Kant's greatest contribution lies in asking such questions, and not in his solutions, for he considers them to be determined by his rationalist background. Kant only deduced them. Hoppe is thus favorably inclined towards Hartmann's philosophy, and views it as promising.

Furthermore, Hoppe claims that it is necessary that philosophy not only analyze noetic categories, but also determine their relation to practical (ethical) ones. The main task of philosophy can only be achieved by means of categorial analysis. Such critical ontology cannot be constructed "top down," but only "bottom up." Hoppe appreciates the fact that, in his attempt to grasp the irrational, Hartmann admits the possibility of intuitive knowledge (Hoppe 1928b, 358). As to values, Hoppe assumed it is rather misleading to speak of knowledge of them. What is at stake is not a cognitive process but an emotional one; it is emotion that captures the essence of values.

Hoppe generally appraises Hartmann's philosophy positively. Although he still finds Hartmann too Kantian, he nevertheless appreciates his turn from idealism to realism. The irrational and the unconditioned play a much more important role in his philosophy than in Kant's system. Conceptual knowledge is further complemented by irrational, intuitive knowledge, which, especially in the realm of values, is more adequate. In contrast to the case of Kant, who made statements about the thing-in-itself notwithstanding his own claim to the effect that this is impossible, Hoppe encountered no equivalent problem in Hartmann's philosophy.<sup>18</sup> In spite of these merits, Hoppe was unsure whether Hartmann had been successful in completing the synthesis of the rational and the irrational. He remained rather skeptical:

viděti v tom, že přihlíží k iracionálnu a k nepodmíněnému; vyhrazuje mu tedy ve své teorii poznání důležitou úlohu. Při pochodu poznání se snaží N. Hartmann vystačiti, pokud to jen jde, s pojmovým poznáním, jež ovšem obdařuje iracionálním rozpětím. Při tom mu neuchází to, že lidské poznání jest schopno postihnouti přímo evidence nějakého úsudku intuicí . . . Takto postupuje N. Hartmann daleko obezřetněji a šťastněji než Kant v tom smyslu, že není v rozporu se svou vlastní teorií poznání" (Hoppe 1928b, 356).

18. Kant, Hoppe said, at least touched on the central topic of philosophy, which was, according to Hoppe, to arrive at a synthesis of the rational and the irrational.

Despite these bold beginnings, the method and the system of N. Hartmann's philosophy give the impression of pure theory . . . Is critical ontology, suggesting as it does that it is intuition and not the demonstrative method that makes us acquainted with the pre-empirical content of our consciousness, even possible? I think that such a kind of ontology is not possible. I consider the designation "critical ontology" as *contradictio in adjecto* . . . Grasping the irrational by other means than by intuition and contemplation can hardly succeed . . . it will never succeed on the basis of analytical, abstract conceptual knowledge. The sphere of our desires and goals lies beyond the reach of rational and general notions. (1928b, 361)

#### 4. JAN BLAHOŠLAV KOZÁK

Another important Czech philosopher interested in Hartmann's ethics was Jan Blahoslav Kozák.<sup>19</sup> His view of Hartmann was rather negative, though. He dedicates a whole chapter to Hartmann in his book *Přítomný stav etiky* (*The Current State of Ethics*) (Kozák 1930). The aim of this book is to map out contemporary ethical theories, but Kozák also uses this opportunity to convey his own opinions about them. We can say that his lifelong philosophical topic was that of ethics: the tension between the obligatory force and unconditionality of moral norms on the one hand, and the inclination towards a scientific explanation of human life on the other. For Kozák, this was an important aspect of a much wider philosophical topic, namely the tension between religious faith and science. As to ethics, Kozák was taken aback by the mysterious character that Hartmann imputes to values. He believed that Hartmann was one of those philosophers who "feel that this realm [of values] 'is,' although it is not a reality, somehow strangely oscillating between being and non-being" (Kozák 1930, 82). The essence of values is not that of reality: they can very often remain unrealized. Kozák assumed that the most important part of *Ethik* was the part dealing with the essence of moral values.

Kozák shared Hartmann's view that values have a mode of being comparable with that of thoughts and notions: i.e., ideal being. He believed (and, in this, he agreed with Hartmann as well) that through the examination of values we can grasp their mutual relations much better than through observation of life:

19. Kozák was one of Jan Patočka's professors. The latter wrote his dissertation *Pojem evidence a jeho význam pro noetiku* (*The Concept of Evidence and its Significance for Noetics*) (Patočka 2008) under him in 1931, and later became his assistant.

Like our ideas and concepts, values have ideal existence. Nothing can impede us from thinking about them in terms of this conceptual abstraction. In fact, we hold, together with Hartmann, that this [conceptual abstraction] can clarify their lawful relations much better than direct observation of confused life. (Kozák 1930, 82)

But what is ideal being? According to Kozák, “ideal being” is a metaphor expressing “the constant possibility of thinking such a notion: i.e., of thinking again with the same meaning” (1930, 82). What is true and valid about a notion is always true and valid. However, the conditions for such validity are not present in the notion itself, but rather in

the structure and lawfulness of beings, on which it relies. The basis of both objective validity and of the identity of conceptual thinking is always somehow the lawfulness of reality—regardless of how indifferent the path of thought from reality to a conceptual sign or its construction may be. (Kozák 1930, 83)

Kozák plainly assumed that by means of such claims we can formulate a better, simpler, and more understandable theory than the one Hartmann had offered, especially in regard to the relation between realized and unrealized values. Unrealized, non-existent values are intentional notions. In contrast, realized values are real qualities and possess causal potency. Nevertheless, this is a different kind of causality from the one operating between physical bodies. Where values are involved, one has to make a decision. The consequence of such a decision will be an act. Here, however, the relation is strictly deterministically causal. Nevertheless, our axiological decisions are not a result of our intuitions regarding them. The decision that something “ought to be” is a matter of faith. No theory whatsoever can explain why something ought to be. The theory of values points to something beyond or external to itself. The theory of values is always on the edge of its own range. A deep devoutness must necessarily be involved. Otherwise, ethics would have to “become eudaimonistic and be greatly mistaken” (Kozák 1930, 85).

Kozák was concerned that Hartmann had to risk tearing the real and the ideal apart.<sup>20</sup> He did not deny that those spheres of reality (ideal and real) are different, but he was worried that if there really were no connection whatsoever between them, values would have no relevance for reality. Once

20. “Mluvení o hodnotách má, jak patrné, jisté nebezpečí v sobě, totiž to, že ideálně a skutečnost roztrhneme více, než se dá ospravedlniti” (Kozák 1930, 85).

we think about absolute values, we detach them from our reality. This is the danger of any conception of absolute values. Kozák worked with Hartmann's book not with a view to explaining the latter's theory, but in order to make use of the questions the latter asked when formulating his own standpoints. The promise of this was that it would enable the construction of a theory of values with no empirical background, so that the values would then have the unconditioned validity that philosophers had always sought. But Kozák agreed with Hoppe that for this a synthesis was necessary.

Kozák appreciated Hartmann's criticism of Kant's ethics and mostly shared his views. He was willing to accept that ethics depends on the theory of knowledge. But since Kant's theory of knowledge is subjectivistic and idealistic, he believed that this could result in an ethics of the same kind. How to avoid this trap? According to Kozák, Hartmann's solution inclined too much towards Platonism, making ethics dependent on ontology. The implementation of values within reality, regardless of which kind they may be, does not seem defensible for Kozák. Any "ought to be" implies that something "is not." The only possible solution, according to Kozák, consists in making the "ought to be" the object of faith. As he said, "without the metaphysical (religious) supplement, the theory of values cannot explain why values should be realized" (1930, 91). Kozák's final evaluation was not too laudatory. He considered Hartmann's *Ethik* as "a modern scholasticism . . . it is a dance of notions; there are unnecessarily many of them and their mutual relations grow by a geometric progression" (Kozák 1930, 95).

##### 5. VLADIMÍR KUBEŠ

In relation to Hartmann, it is also necessary to mention Vladimír Kubeš, who studied under him in Berlin in the early 1930s. Among Czech philosophers, it is probably Kubeš who was influenced by Hartmann the most.<sup>21</sup> In contrast to the other Czech thinkers mentioned so far, it is ontology that attracted his immediate attention, especially the theory of levels of reality. It can even be said that he provided one of the first interpretations of Hartmann's ontology. In his autobiography, Kubeš wrote that studying under Hartmann's supervision

was decisive for my subsequent academic progress. . . . It was Kant and, perhaps even more, Hartmann, who influenced my conception of philosophy and of philosophy of law. (Kubeš 1994, 26)

21. Hartmann's influence on Kubeš was much stronger than on Patočka, who in 1932 also studied in Berlin under him.

Considering that Kubeš does not write anything similar concerning his studies in Heidelberg and Paris, these words must be much more than just a formal courtesy. To be sure, when sharing his impressions about his professors, he asserts outright that “Nicolai Hartmann, by far, impressed me the most” (Kubeš 1994, 27). Compared to what prevails today, his writing style is very personal, occasionally subjective, and this even in works which, according to their titles, seem to be strictly oriented towards research. Autobiographical digressions can be found, for example, in his two-volume *opus magnum* entitled *Dějiny myšlení o státu a právu ve 20. století se zřetelem k Moravě a zvláště Brnu* (*The History of Thought on State and Law in the 20th Century with Respect to Moravia and Especially Brno*), in which he wrote that “in 1932 I met in person undoubtedly the greatest philosopher of the twentieth century; a man who ingeniously and creatively recombined in himself all the wisdom of the past, Nicolai Hartmann” (1995, 169). Kubeš made similar statements several times in other texts (e.g. 2003, 291). In conformity with the philosophy of that time, he was convinced that the ultimate purpose of human knowledge is to create a complete worldview. He belonged to those thinkers who are convinced that scientists provide us with the building blocks, while philosophers provide the conceptions (Kubeš 1994, 148).<sup>22</sup> Such a conception is defined by him as an overall view of the world and human beings, or as the system of ideas which determines our lives.

In a similar way, Kubeš wrote about the legal worldview, which is to be constructed on the basis of the building blocks supplied by particular law-related sciences (the sociology of law, the psychology of law, etc.). This is the task of the critical ontology of law, a branch of philosophy whose subject matter consists in the levels of reality of law. The highest level is the idea of law, under which other ideas are hierarchically ordered: namely, those of family, social contract, guilt and punishment, democracy, international law, state, etc. (Kubeš 1994, 148).

In the history of philosophy, Kubeš sees a negative tendency consisting in the separation of the philosophy of law from general philosophical systems. From Ancient Greek philosophy, through modern philosophy, until the nineteenth century, the philosophy of law was a stable and indispensable part of general philosophical production. Bringing positivism into philosophy caused a crisis, manifested in the shift of attention away from norms (what “ought to be”) and towards just facts (what “is”). The philosophy

22. “Veškeré lidské vědění vyúsťuje nakonec ve výstavbě světového názoru. Jednotlivé vědy poskytují pro výstavbu světového názoru kameny, na kterých pak filozofická věda – filozofie – ex professo buduje světový názor” (Kubeš 1994, 148).

of law started to detach itself from general philosophy, until the bond between them broke completely. Kubeš (1994, 170) assesses the tendency to return to Kant's philosophy—not only in the theory of knowledge or in ethics, but also in the field of philosophy of law—as being the most important turning point in the subsequent development of the discipline, and one visible at the beginning of the twentieth century.

In his own philosophical work, Kubeš tries to prevent the mutual separation of general philosophy and the philosophy of law, assuming philosophy (and ontology in particular) to be the very foundation of the latter. He fights this estrangement on a very solid basis, which he finds in Neo-Kantianism and in Hartmann's ontology. According to Kubeš, the philosophy of law is, above all, the latter's ontology: it studies the very essence and ontological status of laws. It investigates whether and how laws belong to the realm of idealities, or to the real world. For his conception of the real world, Kubeš relies on Hartmann, who showed that "real being is structured into four levels, the lowest of which is basic physical and material being, followed by the level of organic being, the psychical level, and finally the spiritual level" (Kubeš 1994, 142). The old ontology mistakenly attributes the mental domain to the organic one, and the spiritual domain is even extended to the world of idealities. The advantage of the new ontology (i.e., that of Hartmann) is, according to Kubeš, that it does not contain the above-mentioned defects (Kubeš 1969, 80). It helps to overcome not only Neo-Kantianism, but also the primarily epistemological orientation of the philosophy of the first half of the century. The new slogan will no longer be "back to Kant," but "back to objects" (*zpět k objektům*). This does not mean that ontology should replace the theory of knowledge, but rather that these disciplines must henceforth cooperate. Such cooperation is especially needed at the spiritual level of reality, to which law belongs. He considers the ontology of law to be the most important part of the philosophy of law. To be sure, the ontological status of law is a complicated one. According to Kubeš, it does not belong to idealities. This is the place where "normo-ideas" (*normoideje*)—i.e., normative ideas—belong, including the normo-ideas of law itself.

Inspired by Hartmann, particularly by the chapter "The Metaphysics of Personality" in *Ethics*, Kubeš wrote that human beings are the mediators between the phenomenon and the normative idea, between the "is" and the "ought to be." It is they who

convert the categorical duties of normo-ideas into the world of reality, more exactly into the highest level of the hierarchical structure of the judicial



system, which belongs to the spiritual level of reality. In the spiritual level of reality, the subsequent spheres of so-called derived normativity are created; that of derived ought, derived duties, and especially of judicial and moral ought. (Kubeš 1994, 146)

I already mentioned that, for Kubeš, the phenomenon of law belongs to the highest level of the hierarchical structure of the real world. But at the same time it extends towards all the lower levels (via sanctions). He believes that it is a mistake to set a sharp boundary between facts and norms, the causality of the natural world and moral freedom, or between “is” and “ought to be,” the cognitive and the volitional spheres. In his view, the contemporary popular positivistic normative theory of that time rests on a very weak philosophical foundation. Even though the theory is indirectly constructed on the basis of Kant’s philosophy (Hans Kelsen’s theory upon that of Hermann Cohen, and Franišek Weyr’s theory upon that of Schopenhauer), its key notion of “ought” (*sollen*) is, according to him, philosophically highly questionable (Kubeš 1995, 169). He is convinced that the critical ontology of law offers the most suitable approach where theoretical questions of this kind are concerned.

Compared to the so-called left ideal type (*levý ideální typ*), according to which law is knowable and accessible by means of the categories of the lower levels of reality, and which understands law as its content (something similar to Kant’s notion of phenomenon), the so-called right ideal type (*pravý ideální typ*) (the pure theory of law) places law beyond space, time and causality (something similar to Kant’s noumenon) and construes it as purely formal (Kubeš 1994, 171).

The philosophy of law of the twentieth century is built upon three main lines of thought: namely, the Kantian, Hegelian and phenomenological ones. Hartmann, along with Scheler, belongs, according to Kubeš, to the phenomenological line of thought, and he forms “the most important continuation of the phenomenology of the *Logische Untersuchungen*” (Kubeš 1992, 98). Kubeš is convinced that this kind of philosophy, similar to Platonic realism and to the old ontology (destroyed by Kant), is the most promising platform when it comes to providing a feasible solution for the facts-*versus*-norms controversy. Hartmann’s philosophy furnishes, according to Kubeš, a solid philosophical foundation for this kind of legal philosophy. We can still reach knowledge by means of experience—albeit not as Kantians interpret the latter, but rather as phenomenology understands it. Here, experience is the givenness of the object. Objects of experience can be anything: e.g., physical beings, mathematical entities, as well as legal sentences. In other

words, the spiritual level of reality is also an object of experience. In contrast to Kantianism and Neo-Kantianism, Hartmann reverses the relation between object and knowledge. The object is, henceforth, not a product of the spontaneous activity of the human mind, but instead exists independently of and prior to it.

In fact, we can distinguish two phases in the development of Kubeš's legal philosophical thought: a first one in which he was enthusiastic about Kelsen's "pure theory of law," and a second in which he turned away from the latter theory under the influence of Hartmann and developed his own conception (Kubeš 2003). The problem with the pure theory of law is that it is built upon the old mistaken ontology, which assumes that the spiritual level does not belong to the real world and which locates it in some kind of ideal world.

Of course, there is a difference between real being and ideal being. Real being is superior, and its four levels have their own autonomy and their own categories (e.g., causality is a feature of the material level, while teleology and normativity are features of the spiritual one, to which also belongs the phenomenon of law). It is not law, but the normative idea of law (a synthesis of the idea of justice, the idea of purpose, and the idea of freedom), that, according to Kubeš, belongs to ideal being.

Kubeš believes that philosophy, including the philosophy of law, requires an explicit ontology. The main question of the philosophy of law is that of the ontological status of laws. Many theoreticians classify them as idealities. Kubeš, by contrast, classifies them as real beings. If this is the case, we must also determine the level of reality to which they belong:

If this question is solved, the solution to all the other questions will be almost self-evident without further ado. We will therefore demonstrate the crucial importance of critical ontology understood as the main part of philosophy in general and of the philosophy of law in particular. (Kubeš 1995, 175)

The only path to answers here, according to Kubeš, lies in Hartmannian critical ontology. All previous attempts in the history of the philosophy of law have been insufficient, because they were built upon ontologies that assumed law to belong to some absolute, eternal, ideal being. Thanks to its method of categorial analysis, critical ontology is more suited to the analysis of experience. This method cannot be either purely *a priori* or purely *a posteriori*. It cannot be based on either scientific experience alone (as some Neo-Kantians advocate) or just our experience of the natural world (as in phenomenology). The experiential basis, according to Kubeš, is what

he calls “philosophical experience,” which contains all the trials and errors of past philosophers.

Another thesis of the new ontology, important for Kubeš, is that the spiritual and material are both real and irreducible. Ideal being does not contain norms, but only normo-ideas. The highest of these normo-ideas is that of humanity, the pure “ought to be,” which is a synthesis of other normo-ideas (i.e., those of morality, law, truth and righteousness).

While the normo-ideas are absolute, eternal, and invariable, and while they are the very goals of our efforts towards which we tend, have tended, and must tend in that we are humans, so that they [i.e., the normo-ideas; MK] rest in infinity, moral ideas and morality, as well as the idea of law and legal systems, are nevertheless changing, in the same way that the conceptions of beauty and even conceptions of truth and logical correctness are changing—all of this depending on the gradual expansion and deepening of our knowledge. (Kubeš 1995, 226)

The power of human beings rests in their ability to “hear the voices of normo-ideas and to transfer them into the real world” (Kubeš 1995, 227). There is a kind of philosophical anthropology at work in Kubeš’s philosophy of law based on critical ontology. The critical ontology of law also remains connected to the theory of knowledge, especially in terms of its conception of experience, which is neither Neo-Kantian nor phenomenological. Kubeš assures us that such a critical ontology will be oriented towards the sciences and their results. This is why he accepts Hartmann’s conception of experience, which, according to Kubeš, lies somewhere in the middle between pure logical abstraction and mystical intuition. He hopes that Hartmann’s ontology can be used to ground not only the philosophy of law, but also moral ontology and moral epistemology.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Hartmann’s philosophy was well known to a number of Czech philosophers of the first half of the twentieth century. Its role was not that of a dominant approach, but the Czech idealists, especially, did make use of his philosophy to support their own philosophical systems. This is mainly what attracted the attention of Pelikán, Hoppe, Kozák and Kubeš. The aim of this article has been to present the philosophical context in which the first receptions of Hartmann’s philosophy in Czechoslovakia took place. Generally, we can say that the latter’s philosophy attracted Czech philosophers of the interwar period, as being one of the most important systems of that

period, but that he had no unqualified adherents. The only exception was Kubeš, who sought to develop Hartmann's ideas in the field of the ontology of law. In other cases, his ideas were either merely referred to or put to use by them in the context of pursuing their own philosophical research. In 1936, under the strong influence of Neo-Kantianism, Jiřina Popelová published a book entitled *Problém poznání kulturní skutečnosti* (*The Problem of Knowledge of Cultural Reality*), in which she analyzed the noetics of so-called *Geisteswissenschaften*. Jan Patočka, who reviewed this book in *Česká mysl*, noted strong affinities between Hartmann and Popelová. Paradoxically, Popelová, a supporter of critical realism, never even mentioned Hartmann's name in print. Patočka (2006, 517) regretted that she had not elaborated on this ontological part more explicitly, claiming that if she had done so, the noetical analysis would have been much more firmly grounded.

Presenting Hartmann's legacy as it pertains to Czech philosophy of subsequent decades and going up to the present—which would certainly involve examining some original conceptions linked to him in the work of Jan Patočka, Josef Šmajš and Otakar Funda—would require a separate article.

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# Nicolai Hartmann's Conception of Free Will in the Context of the Debate Between Compatibilism and Incompatibilism

*Leszek Kopciuch*

**ABSTRACT** In this article, I analyse the most significant elements of Nicolai Hartmann's conception of free will in the context of compatibilism and incompatibilism. I demonstrate that Hartmann's conception transcends both of these paradigms, since free will seems to combine deterministic and indeterministic elements. As a result, I conclude that Hartmann's conception of reality must contain some indeterministic moments.

**KEYWORDS** compatibilism; determinism; free will; Hartmann, Nicolai; incompatibilism

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Nicolai Hartmann's *Ethics* is one of the most important works in twentieth-century Western theoretical ethics. On the one hand, Hartmann proposes an ethical and axiological objectivism consisting in a very detailed description of many different values and many relevant arguments against ethical and axiological relativism. On the other hand, his *Ethics* offers an equally significant fundamental analysis of human moral freedom. This is why the relation between the relevance of this conception of ethics and its lack of significant influence on contemporary philosophy deserves our attention. This is especially true, given that many contemporary ethical positions—even if they are popular and influential—can be considered controversial. Two examples should suffice: John Leslie Mackie says that objective values do not exist at all. Instead, he explains them as the result of an “error” and formulates five main arguments to justify “moral skepticism” (Mackie 1990, 15–49). The general anthropological position presented by contemporary naturalism and the negation or even destruction of personal free will in light of the experiments of Benjamin Libet and John-Dylan Haynes may also be mentioned (Libet 2011). These two examples are typical of the current ethico-axiological zeitgeist, and of its problems. If values were merely social constructs, the nature of this construction would be very difficult to explain without reduction to non-intentional activities. Moreover, and this is more important, if free will were only an illusion, we could not live practically, because decision-making must be “effective” (in Husserl's sense) in practical life.

There are thus many pressing questions that should be asked in the context of the relation between contemporary conceptions (especially those pertaining to ethics, axiology and anthropology) and the philosophy of Nicolai Hartmann.<sup>1</sup> However, I will only deal with two of those here: (i) What is the relation between Hartmann's understanding of freedom and determinism itself (understood as an ontological standpoint)? (ii) Is he a compatibilist or an incompatibilist? I will also consider the following sub-questions: (iii) How does Hartmann understand the relation between

1. For example: Does the thesis about human freedom against values allow Hartmann to be treated as a representative of ethical externalism? Should we not reject his understanding of responsibility in light of the arguments given by Harry Gordon Frankfurt? Would we be right to accept Hartmann's emotionalism in value cognition? Would it not be better to replace emotionalism with ethical rationalism, as only this can provide an effective basis for ethical discussions and argumentation? And, especially, two general questions should be asked: Why has Hartmann's ethics not really influenced contemporary debates in the field of theoretical ethics? Is it at all possible to use his arguments in current debates? I have already explored some of these questions in my works (2010; 2012a; 2022).



freedom and the real world, which he considers to be totally determined?" (iv) Does he propose a new conception of compatibilism? (v) Is his conception of freedom consistent?

All these questions deal no doubt with different aspects of free will or freedom. To recognize how important the problem of freedom is for Hartmann, it is sufficient to remember that his *Ethics* contains over two hundred pages dealing with this topic. Even Max Scheler, whose opinion about free will was totally different, understood the importance of this problem in Hartmann's ethics very clearly when, in the "Preface" to the third edition of his *Formalism in Ethics*, he wrote critically that Hartmann's interest in free will was rather "exaggerated" (Scheler 1973, 31, footnote 12). Moreover, Hartmann himself explicitly states in the "Foreword to the Third Edition" of the *Ethics* (the third edition was published in 1949) that the topic of free will is one of the main ethical problems (Hartmann 1962, X).<sup>2</sup>

These "historical" justifications may be supplemented by arguments grounded in the ontological relation between human beings and values. For Hartmann, value determinism is indirect; to be realized in the real world, values necessitate human acceptance. Values are both strong and weak. They are strong insofar as they play a foundational role in the structure of human teleological activity and they are weak insofar as they determine human will through human acceptance only. Values are relational because their "material" (content) and "Ought" are directed towards the personal world, and moral values are directed especially towards human free will. Hartmann also believes that even if we cannot prove that we really have free will, many moral phenomena indicate that our possession of it is highly probable—such as, for example, our consciousness of self-determination, various forms of responsibility, and the sense of guilt (Hartmann 1932b, 143–79). Harry G. Frankfurt—well known for his criticism of the idea of the plurality of alternatives—also treats free will as a criterion for defining human personhood: a free person is a being who is able to create effective "second-order desires" (Frankfurt 2007, 20–21).

However, before analysing all these questions, certain other remarks are necessary. It is usually helpful to analyse past philosophical concepts in light of current standpoints. Firstly, this procedure seems to be consistent with the idea of progress in philosophical thinking: if we accept the idea of progress (as Hartmann does), a necessary consequence is that we can know more than our predecessors. Secondly, a person's views can be better

2. All "Forewords" are published in the third and fourth edition of *Ethics*. In this article I refer to the fourth edition (1962).

understood from an external perspective when all of the consequences of those views have already unfolded. Thirdly, accepting this procedure, we can also ask about the contemporary relevance of their views. As far as the relation between the philosophy of Hartmann and contemporary ethical discussions is concerned, all these aspects are valid, but the first and second points are the most important. When examining his analyses of conceptions formulated by other philosophers, one can clearly see how he tends to recognize what was really profound and relevant in the theories being analysed, and what was only a product of the times and historical conditions. Hartmann himself explicitly states that cooperation among philosophers is necessary if they hope to solve any problems: "I cannot imagine progress in their consideration without active cooperation between contemporaries."<sup>3</sup> Fourthly, as is well known, Hartmann distinguishes two types of method in the history of philosophy. The first deals with genealogy and the connections between conceptions, as well as their historical changes and cultural and social contexts. The second analyses the problems themselves, their logic, and their own "history." In this article, I will use the second type of method in relation to Hartmann's own philosophy.

## 2. HARTMANN'S CONCEPTION OF FREE WILL AND DETERMINISM

Based on Hartmann's judgments about Kant's ethics, one might be tempted to conclude that the former was a defender of determinism, due to his very positive opinions concerning the relevance of the latter's understanding of determinism in the context of morality. What this means is that if Kant's concept of freedom can be treated as an example of determinism, then Hartmann's theory can as well, especially given the following explicitly held opinions of Hartmann regarding Kant's conception of freedom: (i) that Kant was right in saying that human freedom does not require indeterminism; (ii) that he was right in saying that human freedom is only of a positive nature, not a negative one; (iii) that he was right in saying that human freedom consists in self-determination only (Hartmann 1932b, 53–61).

Hartmann reads Kant as a philosopher who "first advanced on a new road" in thinking about freedom without indeterminism (Hartmann 1953, 127), and who recognized that the real world was fully determined. Everything that exists must belong to one of two worlds: to the world of nature or that of free persons. As a component of nature, a human

3. "Aber ohne die tätige Mitarbeit der Zeitgenossen sehe ich die Möglichkeit nicht, in ihnen weiter vorzudringen" (Hartmann 1962, X). The "Foreword" to the third edition of *Ethics* is not translated in the English translation of *Ethics*.

being is determined by its necessary regularities and laws. As a member of a community of free persons, a human being is dependent on moral duties and the categorical imperative only. To be free means to act on the basis of a sense of duty that is recognized in the categorical imperative. Human freedom is positive and consists in conformity with the moral imperative. This freedom is positive only insofar as the categorical imperative plays the role of a condition effectively present within the human will and determining its direction.

A similar deterministic conclusion may be arrived at from the perspective of Hartmann's material (non-formal) ontology of the real world.<sup>4</sup> Every real stratum consists in a set of categories determining its structure, qualities and relations to other strata. However, according to Hartmann's laws pertaining to such strata, every higher stratum of reality is partly independent of lower ones. Freedom is not only the privilege of a human being; it also appears on each border between two ontological strata (Hartmann 1964, 493–501; 1953, 124).

Each higher stratum is partially free insofar as it is partially self-determined. Three things are worth emphasizing in this regard. Firstly, freedom of the will is a kind of determination; free will means "self-determined will." Secondly, human free will, in general, is essentially based on categorial freedom; this is possible because so-called strata categories are materially independent of lower ones (Hartmann 1953, 125, 133). The specificity of each stratum consists in its categorial self-determination. Thirdly, the basic form of freedom is autonomy; an autonomous will is the will of a subject that determines its own actions. An autonomous will is the core of the self-determination of the subject.

This kind of categorial determinism may be supplemented with modal determinism, and Hartmann's understanding of possibility, actuality and necessity. On the one hand, when trying to explain the nature of all real processes Hartmann refers to the Megarian tradition. And, on the other hand, when criticizing the notion of real possibility understood as a multiplicity of open alternatives, he clearly prefers the solution given by Leibniz and rejects the theory formulated by Aristotle (Hartmann 2013, 234; 1957a, 85–100; 1957b, 252–78). What does "really possible" mean? According to Hartmann, the answer to this question was formulated by Leibniz in his *principium rationis sufficientis*.

4. A detailed description of this is unnecessary, as it is one of the best-known parts of Hartmann's philosophy.

Leibniz, who first stated this law, gave it the more precise designation “*principium rationis sufficientis*,” “principle of sufficient reason.” The “sufficiency” in this formulation is, no doubt, pleonastic; because a true reason is, of course, a sufficient one. An insufficient reason would not bring about the consequence. But it is certainly also apparent from Leibniz’s formulation that “sufficiency” is essential to the reason (Hartmann 2013, 212).

According to this principle, some event is really possible only if all the conditions required for its occurrence are already met. When they are not met (yet, or not at all), the possibility is not real. In this case, there is only a logical or epistemological possibility consisting in a non-contradiction. This explains the equivalence of the modal categories of possibility, actuality, and necessity in the modal structure of reality (Hartmann 2013, 123–34). What is really possible is also really actual, and what is really actual is really necessary as well.

The principle of sufficient reason holds true for all kinds of being, not just real being; but it also must be considered if one wants to explain the relation between the real past and the real present, and between the real present and the future. What is significant is that, with regard to real being, the principle states that each state which really exists (or will exist in the future) has to be determined by a concrete and complete set of conditions. Hartmann also argues that this is a special type of determination as not every determination is a real determination (Hartmann 2013, 211). Real determination plays out horizontally between events that are concrete, individual, and unfold in time: “Real determination plays out in another dimension, it moves wholly at the level of the concretum. It connects homogeneous components such as the real with the real, and not the real with its principles (or laws). In all strata, it has the form of a nexus” (Hartmann 2013, 211).

A special conception of the connection between freedom and causal determinism may also follow from Hartmann’s critical attitude toward universal teleology and teleologism. Hartmann develops this criticism in many works, especially in *Teleologisches Denken*. It is significant that for him, universal and monistic teleologism renders human freedom impossible. If all events were part of an overarching teleological process, each one of them would have to be determined by the overarching end (the purpose); human freedom and autonomy would thus be impossible:

If the world, from the bottom to the top, were determined teleologically, the highest form of determination would be common to all being. No higher form could rise above it, and the human will would have no determinative superiority

over subhuman processes. That is to say, it would exhibit no element of super-added autonomy as over against the processes of nature; instead it would be on the same footing with these natural processes. Consequently the autonomy of a higher mode of determination would be impossible for him. The accuracy of this reasoning is further confirmed by the reflection that purposes of the more inclusive teleological processes of the world would, as superior powers, oppose all purposes of man, leaving the latter no scope at all. (Hartmann 1953, 129–30)

One can find the same line of reasoning in one of the religious antinomies that Hartmann describes in the *Ethics*: the antinomy of divine providence. Hartmann remarks that God, understood as an omnipotent providence, would make it impossible for human beings to be free and morally responsible. Divine providence would be a finalistic kind of determination. Its determining power would be infinite and almighty, and human activity would be unable to affect it. The teleological activity of human beings would be impotent against the omnipotence of God (Hartmann 1932b, 266–70). However, according to Hartmann there is also an ontological reason for this hypothetical impotence. He believes that the structure of the teleological nexus is “closed,” whereas that of the causal nexus is “open” (Hartmann 1966, 121–26). The causal nexus is “open” insofar as it is superinformable and many other nexuses may be added to it. The final nexus is “closed” insofar as one cannot add to it other final nexuses without transforming its goal into a means for a further end. As a consequence, human teleological determinism cannot be included into universal teleology without loss of the autonomy of human activity: all human purposes would be weaker than the stronger final universal goal, they would all be mere “means” to achieve the final universal end. For Hartmann, human teleologism cannot be synchronized with universal teleologism without contradiction.

Therefore, human freedom is incompatible with a fully teleologically determined world. But this does not mean that it is incompatible with a fully determined world as such. The teleological nexus is only one type of determination; there are other types of determination besides this one. Freedom is not incompatible with the causal nexus if the latter is not interpreted in a monistic way. A pluralistic determinism is rather a necessary condition for freedom: to will and act, we must assume that we ourselves may be considered the source of our own will and the agent of our actions. If we have free will, we are able to posit a goal and realize it in the world using its objective causal regularities.

This deterministic conclusion can also be supported by Hartmann's understanding of axiological determination. Let us repeat: he believes,

in an aporetic manner, that there are both weak and strong values; he also believes that value determinism can be both direct and indirect. Unlike ontological categories, values are considered weak because they influence human activity through human acceptance and agreement only. However, they are also considered strong because they are the only principles that can shape human motivation and activity (a sort of motivation different from all biological inclinations). Without values, we would be “blind”; to know what to do, we have to know what is valuable. The determination of values functions indirectly, since, to influence our actions, values have to be accepted by us. Therefore, according to Hartmann, the human being is “the only being which mediates between the Ought and life” (Hartmann 1932b, 22).

At the same time, this kind of determination is direct in axiological consciousness in the sense that values determine human consciousness irrespective of the human will (Hartmann 1955, 302–3). We can clearly see this kind of determination at work when our value-feeling negates our egoistic inclinations or interests. This is why Hartmann believes, just like Scheler and von Hildebrand, that value-feeling is the only cognitive connection between persons and values (Hartmann 1955, 303; 1965, 553–62). Every form of axiological or ethical thinking (reasoning) is only secondary and has to be based on such a feeling. When explaining the priority of value-feeling, Hartmann writes:

But this does not mean that it is also an original, explicitly present consciousness of law. . . . Here, as there, a special philosophical method is needed, which discovers these laws and makes their content and their “matter” accessible to consciousness and to the conceptual understanding. Here, as there, such a method is secondary. In ethics it rests upon the primal feeling of value, and can do nothing except draw out from the total emotional phenomenon the aprioristic content which was already within it. (Hartmann 1932a, 178)

The idea of the apriority of value-feeling is deeply typical of German material value ethics. Even if a person is able to transform his or her value-feeling (in self-education, for example, and in axiological or moral development), this feeling itself, in relation to values, is passive and receptive, and reflects only their range and content.<sup>5</sup> The correct or “true” feeling must be determined by values, not by the subject. What the subject

5. According to Hans M. Baumgartner, Hartmann’s concept of value-feeling seems to be contradictory; Hartmann seems to interpret it as receptive and non-receptive at the same time (Baumgartner 1962, 129–30).

is able to influence and transform is only its own ability to feel, its own value sensibility. This way of thinking about the passivity and receptivity of value-feeling is no doubt represented by Hartmann as well (as one of main representatives of the material ethics of values):

The primary emotional consciousness of value, where it exists at all and in so far as it is present, cannot, to one's liking, agree or not agree with the principle, as is the case with disposition and action. It is necessarily in harmony with ethical principle, being nothing but its expression in consciousness; it is the way in which principle modifies consciousness and, in modifying it, is present. (Hartmann 1932a, 102)

Consequently, in general terms Hartmann's philosophy of free will is intermeshed with various forms of determinism. These are (i) a "vertical" categorial determinism (between categories and *concretum*), (ii) a modal determinism, (iii) a "horizontal" determinism (between different facts or events), and (iv) an axiological determinism (in human activity and cognition). In this context, it is no wonder that Hartmann writes that "Free will is not undetermined will, but is precisely a will that is determined and chooses determinately" (Hartmann 1932b, 49).

### 3. IS HARTMANN A COMPATIBILIST OR AN INCOMPATIBILIST, AND DOES HE PROPOSE A NEW CONCEPTION OF COMPATIBILISM?

Compatibilism and incompatibilism constitute the two main positions in the contemporary debate over free will and determinism (Warfield 2005, 613–30; Kane 2005; Fischer et al. 2007, 1–4). Compatibilists accept three general statements: i) The real world is totally determined; nothing in the real world occurs without a cause; everything that really exists has its source in something else. ii) Human freedom may be interpreted as compatible with universal (common, general) determinism. iii) To achieve such compatibility, it is necessary to redefine "freedom," which must be understood as a form of determination and not as an absence of it. Human freedom must always be of a positive nature, in contrast to so-called "negative freedom," which amounts to an absence of dependence.

Incompatibilists deny the second statement and claim that the two assertions are incompatible (i.e., the positive claim about determinism in the world and the positive assertion about human free will). As a result, this type of incompatibilism is composed of three views: i) that the real world is totally determined; ii) that free will cannot be aligned with universal determinism; iii) that free will is impossible—the belief that we are free

is merely an illusion. However, this is only a simple form of incompatibilism. What is typical of it is that free will is understood as independence, but independence from what? Obviously, independence from every condition external to our will and susceptible of influencing our choices and actions. It does not matter whether these are natural or cultural forces, divine laws, objective moral values, psychological regularities, or logical principles. What matters is that we are always only negatively free in relation to external determining conditions.

Given its negative character, let us call the last form of incompatibilism “negative incompatibilism.” There is, however, a more complex form of incompatibilism, which I will henceforth call “positive incompatibilism.” Its main thesis is that universal determinism in the world does not exclude human free will at all. A very specific rationalization is often proposed to justify such an opinion. A human being—or human will, at least—is treated as an entity that exists in the world, although, at the same time, he or she is not of that nature. There is a principal dimension in human beings that does not belong to this world and cannot be explained as a part of reality. Something such was presented by Jean-Paul Sartre, who asserted that human existence is “nothingness” because of the lack of a nature possessed by “being” (Sartre 2007, 20–23). There is thus one form of compatibilism, and two forms of incompatibilism (one negative and one positive).<sup>6</sup>

At the very beginning, Hartmann’s solution seems to be fully consistent with the main idea of the *general* form of compatibilism. This means that, for Hartmann, free will exists in conformity with determinism. Moreover, free will is itself a form of determination. This interpretation is justified insofar as general compatibilism says nothing about the concrete nature of determination. Thus, it is irrelevant whether one is dealing with the causal or the teleological nexus. If compatibilism is the theory according to which everything is causally determined, then Hartmann’s opinion about compatibilism is negative: the real world is of a pluralistic nature and this is why monistic causal determinism is false.<sup>7</sup> If compatibilism is the theory which states that everything is teleologically determined, then Hartmann’s conclusion is negative as well, due to the closed nature of the teleological nexus (Hartmann 1966, 123–26).

6. Of course, this classification is very general; its goal is only to distinguish models, or the most general types of thinking about free will and determinism. It is widely acknowledged that there have been multifarious forms of compatibilism and incompatibilism over the course of the history of philosophy.

7. In his analysis, Krzysztof Rojek also examines the relationship between Hartmann’s conception of freedom and compatibilism (see: Rojek 2021, 56–58).



The foregoing conclusions demonstrate the specificity and originality of Hartmann's attitude. It is typical of Hartmann that he rejects all forms of monism and that, as a result, he rejects the typical compatibilist question: is free will compatible with a causally determined world? This question is wrong because universal causalism is false. If someone (like, e.g., Leibniz) endeavors to understand universal determinism as a form of teleologism, they are committing the same monistic mistake. However, let us repeat, Hartmann's conception of freedom is consistent with general compatibilism, because universal pluralistic determinism does not exclude the possibility of free will, which is a kind of determination that can be consistent with other types of determination. But in this case, Hartmann does not offer a standard compatibilist conception of free will, because he does not think that the latter consists in some inner agreement or in an attitude of acceptance. Instead, he holds that it is a novel kind of determination. Free will does not consist in internal conformity with what is necessary, but is itself one of the conditions determining what is necessary (Hartmann 2013, 222–24).

This is why Hartmann's explicit view is consistent with general compatibilism. At the same time, his philosophy of freedom can also be, to some extent, interpreted as a form of incompatibilism. To explain such a double interpretation, we must distinguish Hartmann's own words from the consequences that can be inferred from them.<sup>8</sup>

#### 4. HARTMANN'S CONCEPTION OF FREEDOM AND OF THE REAL WORLD

Let us now examine Hartmann's standpoint in further detail. There are at least three reasons to consider the theory of the antinomies at this point. Firstly, Hartmann formulates the antinomies of freedom to verify Kant's conception of freedom. The formulation of these is an attempt to correct the latter's mistakes, and especially his opinion that human personal freedom requires conformity with the categorical imperative. Hartmann explicitly claims:

In the Kantian sense, "reason" is not individual, but is the universal reason in which individuals participate. The "moral law" is the principle of a "transcendental subject," a practical "consciousness in general," not otherwise than the twelve categories are principles of a theoretical "consciousness in general." Hence, transcendental freedom is not at all freedom of the moral person. For he is merely the empirical individual. (Hartmann 1932b, 102–3)

8. Hartmann uses the same method when analysing Kant's theory of freedom.

Hartmann, of course, explicitly voices appreciation for Kant's "dualistic" determinism. However, he tries to develop it and transform it into a deterministic pluralism (Hartmann 1932b, 59–61; 1953, 128). Therefore, one can use the antinomies of freedom as an effective tool to evaluate Hartmann's determinism (and "compatibilism") in relation to freedom. Secondly, these antinomies constitute the core of Hartmann's philosophy of freedom. Thirdly, he himself seems to invite others to conduct such an analysis. The opinion he presented in the preface to the third edition of the *Ethics*—even if explicitly directed at his contemporaries—is significant, and can also be interpreted in a more general way. Hartmann writes there that philosophers must cooperate if they want to explain the problems connected with the second antinomy of freedom.<sup>9</sup>

There are two main antinomies in Hartmann's analysis of Kant's theory of freedom: the antinomy of the Ought and the antinomy of autonomy.<sup>10</sup> The first one expresses the principal problem raised by Kant's conception of freedom as the predicate of a person who acts on the basis of the categorical imperative: in order to show that human will is only free if it is determined by an imperative, one must show, at the same time, that will is not determined by this imperative and that the willing subject can accept or reject it. In order to be free, the will must be "aloof" from the imperative (Hartmann 1932a, 158–160). The condition of aloofness is not allowed by Kant's dualistic philosophy; if the human will is not determined by the categorical imperative, it must be determined by nature. As a consequence, Kant's philosophy of freedom does not demonstrate that our will is free and raises the antinomy of the Ought. Hartmann emphasizes that, already, Fichte "recognized the bearing of the antinomy, which exists

9. "Es sind freilich die schwierigsten Fragen, die sich in diesen Partien zusammendrängen. Aber es sind die alte Grundprobleme der Ethik. Ohne die tätige Mitarbeit der Zeitgenossen sehe ich die Möglichkeit nicht, in ihnen weiter vorzudringen" (Hartmann 1962, X).

10. Hartmann formulates more antinomies of freedom, including five antinomies of religion. There are also many different positive and negative opinions about these antinomies. For instance, H.M. Baumgartner criticizes them, as he thinks that it is only a specific interpretation of Hartmann himself that produces those antinomies; it is not freedom itself that is aporetic, but only Hartmann's way of thinking about freedom (Baumgartner 1982, 35–45). Anton Schlittmaier endeavors to demonstrate that, by describing antinomies, Hartmann seems not to remember that, based on a pure description of the phenomena, one should know (and Hartmann certainly does) that axiological determination is weak and indirect (Schlittmaier 1999, 102–3). The most extreme opinion is presented by Martin Morgenstern, who thinks that Hartmann formulates antinomies only in order to show how excellent his own method is because it is able to solve them. What is typical of Hartmann's philosophy, according to Morgenstern, is something like "the pleasure of formulating and solving antinomies" (Morgenstern 1992, 195).

between the Ought and the Will, upon the question of freedom" (Hartmann 1932b, 107). To solve the Ought-antinomy, one should accept the idea that human persons have this distance and are free in relation to the imperative. However, this results in the next antinomy, which shows that there is an unresolvable contradiction between the solutions to both antinomies (the causal antinomy and the antinomy of the Ought): what makes it possible to solve the causal antinomy at the same time makes it impossible to solve the antinomy of the Ought, and what makes it possible to solve the Ought-antinomy makes it impossible to solve the causal antinomy at the same time. This contradiction is evident. Hartmann analyses it particularly on three levels and describes three different conflicts: between positive and negative freedom, between being determined by values and not being determined by values, and between general and individual freedom (Hartmann 1932b, 126–33).

The solutions proposed by Hartmann seem to be comprehensive and based on the idea of personal self-determination that constitutes a third level of axiological determination as such (value cognition, decision about realization, and realization itself). Self-determination is placed on the second level. Hartmann argues that it is impossible to include it in Kant's conception due to the dualistic nature of Kant's thought: either I am a member of the moral world or I am a member of nature. *Tertium non datur*. This is self-determination wherein, on the one hand, an individual person is not yet determined by values and, on the other hand, this person is no longer determined by natural forces. It is the level of self-determination where real personal determinism starts. A person must choose a proper (i.e., valuable) way of behavior, and only in this way can he or she be determined by values: being determined by values must be preceded by the self-determination of a person.

In this way, Hartmann replaces Kant's deterministic dualism with a deterministic pluralism composed of three levels: natural determination, value determination, and the self-determination of the person. Human will is thus determined by values, but the latter cannot determine the will directly: it is always the free person who must decide which values are to be realized. The person must respond to their appeal or demand and must really do so within his or her own value cognition and self-determination. Values cannot be realized in the real world in a moral way without human acceptance. As Hartmann writes:

Among these it is the ability to decide, in which the element of freedom is most conspicuously contained. This ability is especially essential to the

metaphysical situation. If the person were constrained to follow the requirement of the Ought in regard to all apprehended values, he would indeed still be a mediator between value and actuality, a pivot of the Ought in the real world, but he would be a passive pivot, a forced mediator. He would not be an entity in which the distinctive valuational qualities could manifest themselves; he could very well actualize situational values beyond himself, but not moral values in himself. Man would then be without will as regards the values apprehended. . . . He is by no means an absolutely faithful mediator. He does not act under valuational points of view as under some necessity. Even if he possessed complete insight into values and unlimited power, he would not make the world perfect. (Hartmann 1932, 21–22)

We have now reached the core of the problem of free will: what is its structure? If freedom is understood as self-determination, we must ask what kind of reasons (motivations) are used by a free subject in order to determine its own will. Such reasons must exist according to all forms of determinism. The answer seems to be given in Hartmann's thesis that each stratum is positively free in relation to the lower strata. However, does not positive freedom assume negative freedom? In general, it is only if a person is negatively free that they can fill this empty space of negative freedom with some positive reasons. In other words, positive freedom is conditioned by negative freedom. Yet, in Hartmann's opinion a positive human freedom must be doubly directed towards nature and towards values—and this opinion is especially significant given its similarity to that of Kant. I am positively free in my relation to nature, because my activity is based on values. I am positively free in relation to values, because values can really determine me only through my activity and my acceptance of them. Only human beings are able to recognize values, accept them, and use their own real power to manifest values in the real world. But to do so in a moral way, human beings must also have the possibility of rejecting values. In this context, the following question comes to be asked: is this not a definition of negative freedom—to have the possibility to do something or not? The answer is obviously affirmative.

In this context, Hartmann's solutions to the Ought-antinomy should be reconsidered. What I mean, in particular, is the explanation given by Hartmann of the following issue:

How can freedom as against the principle be positive? It means simply that the will can act one way or another! But this open alternative is the form of "freedom in the negative sense," of negative freedom of choice, concerning

which it was shown that it is not freedom of the will. The free will is certainly not an undetermined will; but prior to the choice the will is an undetermined will. (Hartmann 1932b, 128–29)

However, Hartmann explains that this is only an apparent contradiction. To see this, one needs to consider that axiological determination is, for him, of a complex nature and is composed of several stages. This is why an axiological determination can contain various types of freedom without contradiction. When someone, for example, considers what type of value should be chosen, they are positively free; when someone's decision is already made, their freedom in relation to values is only positive. Thus, there is no contradiction when an axiological determination is treated as a process of a complex nature. What is important here is that Hartmann explicitly writes that human will is positively free only in relation to other real conditions like psychological motivation, biological instinct, or social pressure. Everything in the real world has to be fully determined. Hartmann also states that this is the sense of freedom which Kant meant in the solution he gave to the causal antinomy (Hartmann 1932b, 54–56). However, values are not real for Hartmann—they belong to the ideal sphere of being.<sup>11</sup> As a result, in relation to values, human freedom can also be negative (Hartmann 1932b, 223–30). Therefore, when it comes to values, human freedom

11. The ideal self-being of values seems to be a concept that, even if controversial, is peculiar to Hartmann's ethics. However, to understand this concept properly, one has to consider the following explanations. It is true that Hartmann never actually modified his theory explicitly. However, he faced many criticisms and significantly added a small yet valid footnote in the second edition of the *Ethics* (namely, the footnote in Chapter XVI): "Gegen den hier eingeführten Begriff des Ansichseins hat sich seinerzeit—beim ersten Erscheinen dieses Buches—ein wahres Sturmlaufen der Kritik erhoben. Der Angriff traf indessen auch nicht einen einzigen der hier entwickelten Punkte. Das meiste von dem, was vorgebracht wurde, beruhte auf gröblicher Verwechslung mit dem kantischen ‚Ding an sich.‘ Andere Missverständnisse nahmen das Ansichsein für etwas Substantielles, oder wenigstens für etwas isoliert für sich Bestehendes. Vor allen solchen Verirrungen muss hier eindringlich gewarnt werden. Das ‚Ansichsein‘ besagt vielmehr etwas ganz Schlichtes, durchaus Nachweisbares: die Unabhängigkeit vom Dafürhalten des Subjekts—nicht mehr und nicht weniger" (Hartmann 1962, 148). This footnote has not been translated into English. The interpretation proposed by Hartmann here is only epistemological, and the self-existence of values means only that they are independent of any cognition. Epistemological independence is not the same as metaphysical independence. However, the main content of this chapter regrettably remained unchanged. Ewald van der Vossenbergh expresses a similar opinion: "H. stellt hier also das gnoseologische Ansichsein in den Vordergrund. Dennoch nimmt er an mehreren Stellen in seinen Werken mehr als bloss diese Unabhängigkeit von unserem Erkennen an . . . . Meines Erachtens setzt sich diese Ungewissheit und dieser Zweifel in allen Hartmannschen Werken fort; bald wird bloss das gnoseologische Ansichsein angenommen, bald deutlich der ontologische Charakter herausgearbeitet" (Vossenbergh 1963, 8).

is both positive and negative.<sup>12</sup> The human will is positively free with regards to values, since its agreement, its “yes,” constitutes a necessary component of all real value-determinism. Without human acceptance, values cannot determine real human activity. This is why, according to Hartmann, the human will and its act of value-acceptance adds something to values themselves: it gives to values its own real determination and power. Only in this manner can values be “realized.” However, at the same time, the human will is negatively free when a person makes choices and decides which values should be realized. It is only free human decision (meaning negatively free decision) that determines which value will be chosen and realized. Therefore, Hartmann claims that his own solution to the problem of freedom completes Kant’s own theory of freedom.

In this way, one gets to the heart of the matter. In order to avoid the contradiction that is contained in the antinomy of autonomy, Hartmann must accept that human will is not determined by ideal values, at least partly. However, it does not suffice to show that there is no contradiction here. It would rather be necessary to demonstrate that this “real” freedom cannot be interpreted as undetermined will. As a matter of fact, one cannot find such a demonstration in Hartmann’s ethics. One only encounters a distinction between free will towards values and free will towards real conditions. The principal question is whether personal will, which is negatively free in relation to values, does not have to be real human will. If so—and any other answer would seem absurd—the next question of importance will be whether we should not accept the idea that there is something in the real world that is both real and undetermined.

As far as the first question is concerned, Hartmann’s critique of Kant’s (transcendental) ethical subject leads us to respond in the affirmative. Only a real person, and not a transcendental reason or transcendental subject, is able to be a real moral subject; only a real person, and not a transcendental reason or subject, can be free and responsible. Hence, Hartmann maintains that Kant’s perspective is unrelated to the real subject of morality and that, in fact, it misinterprets the real person as the subject of morality. When criticizing Kant’s opinion that values are constituted by reason, Hartmann writes:

Yet herein is contained a whole nest of arbitrary assumptions. Especially has it been shown to be false, that moral principles emanate from reason. But

12. In her analysis of political freedom, Alicja Pietras uses Hartmann’s distinction between positive and negative freedom (see: Pietras 2019, 140–61).

even granted that this were so, we should thereby have only a “transcendental freedom” of reason, not the freedom of the person as an individual entity; hence not a freedom of the will. In the Kantian sense, “reason” is not individual, but is the universal reason in which individuals participate. . . . Kant means to prove the freedom of the will; yet he does not notice that he is actually proving something altogether different—something, to be sure, which is essential as a presupposition of freedom of the will but is nevertheless not that freedom itself: what he proves is merely that the principle is autonomous. (Hartmann 1932b, 102–03)

Given the individuality of a person, according to Hartmann the subject of morality must belong to the real world; the fact that a person has negative freedom with regards to values means that reality itself must contain a certain type of negative freedom. The moral subject must be a real person that must be negatively free. Only such freedom can lay the foundation for the morally relevant form of positive freedom. Without negative freedom, a positive one seems to be a sort of dependence.

Regrettably, Hartmann does not use terms such as “person” and “real determination of a person” consistently. I am referring here to what he says in *Possibility and Actuality*:

What has not yet been decided, however, is the question of the self-determination of the will itself. For this always occurs under the influence of values; however, values are not products of the will, but rather, universal essences. Even with regard to them, the will must have the freedom to decide for or against them. This side of the question of freedom, however, no longer involves the problem of real determination. For that against which this freedom holds its own is no longer real. (Hartmann 2013, 224)

Two things are important in this passage. On the one hand, he correctly notes that a person must decide for or against “ideal” values: i.e., that a person must decide in relation to something which is not real. However, he also consistently says that the problem of freedom is not involved in that of real determination (Hartmann 2013, 224). If the subject of a decision is a real person, their decision must be real as well, even if they decide for or against something that is not real. Hartmann’s argument would be right on the level of axiological cognition alone: there is actually a relation between reality and ideality here. But, if a real decision must be individual, as Hartmann explicitly states in his third antinomy, it must be a real determination.

### 5. IS HARTMANN'S CONCEPTION OF FREE WILL CONSISTENT?

For the foregoing reasons, I conclude that if one wants to understand Hartmann's philosophy of freedom consistently, and take account of its consequences, then his critique of indeterminism and negative freedom in the real world ultimately leads, rather paradoxically, to the acceptance of both indeterminism and negative freedom. Of course, Hartmann himself would probably claim otherwise. He would probably say that my interpretation is unjustified. According to him, if a person is not yet determined by values, and not already determined by natural forces, it does not follow that they are completely undetermined. A person is always self-determined, and self-determination is fully consistent with universal pluralistic determinism. Personal self-determination is one of the real determinations.

However, given these doubts, should we not infer that personal determinism requires some distance from a subjective principle contained in self-determination? And, moreover, Hartmann explicitly notes that even if we cannot understand what self-determination is in itself, we can cognize the teleological nature of its structure (Hartmann 1932b, 237–39). This is precisely the point where my worries begin: typical human teleology requires consciousness and choice—not only consciousness of what determines us, but also the ability to choose it. An argument against Hartmann similar to mine was deployed by Hartmann himself against Leibniz. When criticizing the latter's conception of freedom, Hartmann explicitly noted that it is insufficient to say that there is a principle in the general structure of personal subjects determining their activity. If one wants to argue that free will is possible, one must also demonstrate that human will is free in relation to its general principle. Free will must be individual and determined; it must not be determined by its general principle. This argument, which Hartmann formulates against Leibniz, is conclusive insofar as Leibniz's metaphysics is individualistic:<sup>13</sup>

Behind the individual will, directing it, there stands no general law, no transcendental subject, no absolute ego. Even in its metaphysical foundation it is individual. Hence, what a man does, wills or even only bears within himself as an inner commitment, is to be attributed to himself alone. He is an absolutely accountable and responsible being. . . . Here another mistake is committed: the freedom of the monad is not the freedom of consciousness, but that of a deeply unconscious metaphysical entity. Already in his

13. On Hartmann's relation to Leibniz, see the present author's two articles (written in Polish) (Kopciuch 2009, 213–22; 2012a, 165–74).



predisposition man is here actually predestined. He cannot will or act otherwise than he must, with his given predisposition. (Hartmann 1932b, 122)

In general, however, Hartmann's attitude towards Leibniz's conception of freedom is rather complex (Hartmann 1957a, 252–78). On the one hand, he accepts Leibniz's idea that freedom must be individual, but, on the other hand, he criticizes the latter's thesis that free will can be identified with spontaneity (Hartmann 1932b, 120–23). Through its own spontaneity, human will can be independent of the external world, but to be really free it must be independent of its own internal principle as well (Hartmann 1957a, 269–70).

Based on Hartmann's criticism of Leibniz, one can expect that his own conception rectifies Leibniz's theory in that it adds the idea of independence between a subject and its principle. This is the most crucial point of my considerations here. If free will is independent in relation to its own principle, it must also be negatively free and undetermined. This conclusion is logical in itself, but not consistent with Hartmann's own explicit statements; for him, the real world is fully determined, even if different parts of it are determined in different ways.

This interpretation may also be supported by referring to the "metaphysical" core of free will, which is described in the third level of the antinomy of autonomy. Hartmann thinks that we are unable to explain the nature of individual self-determination, because of its irrational nature. He provides several reasons for this metaphysical irrationality, three of which are especially relevant to our topic. First, freedom is irrational insofar as one cannot explain the relation between the individual motivation of a person and the general personal type of determination. Second, it is irrational insofar as one cannot understand what the content of the teleological determination of the will is. It is clear that the activity of the will is teleological but, at the same time, it is unclear what the structure of this teleology is: if human teleology is based on values, how to explain the structure of a decision in relation to values? And third, he is explicit that the "irrationality" of free will may be compared to problems we encounter when attempting to define such terms as "principle," "reality," or "value."

Hartmann treats the problem of free will as a metaphysical question: one cannot explicate it, and yet one cannot abandon it. At the same time, though, he explains that there is no place here for negative freedom:

It is clear that even the concept of positive freedom does not here offer a solution. Each positive component—it might be axiological and would not

be included here—would be already drawn into the texture of ontological determinants. But still less can there be a question of merely negative freedom. Irrespective of the fact that this can exist only over against values, not over against ontological necessity, the merely “empty place” in the texture is contrary to the meaning of positive self-determination. (Hartmann 1932b, 240)

Individual self-determination is incomprehensible, because free will cannot be identified with spontaneity. There must therefore be an ontological distance between the individual person and their individual principles. This is why, if one wants to pursue this idea consistently, one must accept that the result of this is a kind of indeterminism: a person has to be undetermined by his or her individual principle. Even though this kind of reading of Hartmann is rather uncommon, a similar interpretation of his conception of determinism is adhered to by Hedwig Below. She also thinks, on the one hand, that Hartmann’s positive freedom is based on a negative one and, on the other hand, that in his ontology of the real world Hartmann is explicit that negative freedom in relation to the real does not exist (Below 1966, 150–53).

Hartmann would probably reject such an interpretation. Nevertheless, at the same time, he states that this is the level at which our thinking about freedom seems to be impotent. The situation is somewhat paradoxical. He should not speak about the deepest level of freedom because he interprets it as a metaphysical (trans-intelligible) dimension. However, while rejecting being undetermined, Hartmann claims to know something about this dimension, even if it is trans-intelligible.

To summarize, Hartmann’s explicit view can be made consistent with general compatibilism. Paradoxically, however, his philosophy of free will can also, to some extent, be interpreted as a form of incompatibilism. His critique of indeterminism and negative freedom seems to be partly inconsistent, because his understanding of personal freedom appears to contain an element of negative freedom, even though he himself does not confirm this. Despite this apparent inconsistency, there is no doubt that Hartmann’s philosophy of free will is the greatest achievement of his *Ethics*. No one else has analysed this problem as deeply as he did, even if his concepts contain some ambiguities.

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ARTICLES ON OTHER SUBJECTS

# Ethical Diachronicity, Metaethical (Non-)Factualism, and the later Wittgenstein

*Carl Humphries*

**ABSTRACT** Discussions of moral luck, exceptionalism, and ethical watersheds raise the question of what it would mean for our ethical commitments to exhibit, in an axiologically non-trivial way, a diachronic character. This would render a particular evaluation applicable, by virtue of its content, only at certain times and not others. It would also make whether or not there happen to be cases we can point to at a given time and for a given domain contingent on facts about what antecedently occurred in the world. I explore this first by considering how the issue relates to the metaethical division between factualists and non-factualists, and then by examining Wittgenstein's distinctive line of thinking, in *On Certainty*, about how framing commitments and empirico-factual beliefs combine in ways that change over time. I conclude that theorising about ethical diachronicity in such terms leads to a problem of self-referentiality, but argue that while such an approach entails a certain "throwing away of the ladder" of philosophical analysis, this need not leave us with nothing to say. There can be a meaningful consideration of putative cases of ethical diachronicity in other ways, via personal histories and fictional narratives.

**KEYWORDS** ethical diachronicity; ethical watersheds; metaethical (non)-factualism; moral exceptionalism; moral luck; Wittgenstein

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Taken together, the topics of moral luck, exceptionalism, and ethical watersheds all seem to raise a larger philosophical question about whether our ethical commitments can, in some axiologically non-trivial way, possess a constitutively diachronic character. At its simplest, this would mean that a particular evaluation, in virtue of its content, applies only at certain times and not others. Yet it may also be taken to imply something more, which is that whether or not there are examples in play at a given time for a given domain could conceivably be a function of what changes have or have not occurred up to that time, such as would bear in an axiologically non-trivial way on that same area of evaluative concern (or, indeed, on reality as a whole). The present article aims to explore the implications of this feature by seeking to consider how ethical diachronicity thus construed shows up relative to the debate in metaethics between those who take evaluations to emerge as direct entailments of facts and their practical implications, and those who take them to manifest something separate from these that frames our understanding of their significance. I shall argue that it proves problematic for both kinds of metaethical approach, and that given such difficulties, it makes sense to consider how it relates to the later Wittgenstein's broader conception, in *On Certainty*, of how framing commitments and empirico-factual beliefs combine together irreducibly in ways that change over time. I will then consider the challenges the latter idea faces when we seek to apply it in this area.

Section 2 of the article outlines reasons for thinking that moral luck, exceptionalism, and the possibility of ethical watersheds represent plausible yet distinct examples of ethical diachronicity. Section 3 begins by stipulating a minimal axiological non-triviality constraint as a conceptual basis for distinguishing between evaluatively non-trivial and trivial cases. It then explores, with reference to the distinctions between fundamental and non-fundamental value and between intrinsic and extrinsic value, whether ethical diachronicity can be plausibly construed as axiologically non-trivial in factalist or non-factalist metaethical terms. Section 4 considers the thinking of the later Wittgenstein, especially as expressed in his "riverbed analogy" in *On Certainty*. I raise an objection, which is that because that conception cannot itself be usefully endorsed in this context as either just a (non-factual) framing commitment or a (non-framing) factual one, what it asserts will apply to itself, generating a variant of the Tractarian problem of self-referential propositional assertions. This means that invoking it to shed light on diachronicity (in ethics) will carry the implication that its own validity is similarly diachronic. Finally, in Section 5, I draw a conclusion

from this, which is that it entails a certain “throwing away of the ladder” of philosophical analysis but nevertheless need not leave us with nothing to say: there can be a meaningful consideration of cases of ethical diachronicity in other ways, via personal histories and fictional narratives.

## 2. MORAL LUCK, MORAL EXCEPTIONALISM, AND ETHICAL WATERSHEDS

Responding, in a postscript, to a collection of articles discussing the problem of moral luck as previously outlined both by himself and by Thomas Nagel, Bernard Williams writes:

The most important source of misunderstanding . . . was that I raised, as I now think, three different issues at once. . . . The third . . . is that of retrospective justification, and this is the widest, because it can arise beyond the ethical, in any application of practical rationality. It is the question of how far, and in what ways, the view that an agent retrospectively takes of himself or herself may be affected by results and not be directed simply to the ways in which he or she deliberated, or might better have deliberated, before the event. (Williams 1993, 255–56)

It is precisely this issue that Williams then proceeds to elaborate further, in terms that suggest that the misunderstandings he perceives to have occurred in relation to his own earlier formulations can in large part be put down to the failure of his interlocutors to grasp this particular aspect of his concerns:

We may say that it is natural enough to be upset if things turn out badly, for oneself or others, as a result of one’s action—in that sense, to regret the outcome—but that self-criticism rationally applies only to the extent that one might have avoided the outcome by taking greater thought or greater care in advance. Reflection will then naturally turn toward asking when it is true that one might have avoided the outcome: and this reflection may eventually lead to skepticism. But the question I wanted to press comes before that reflection. It questions, rather, a presupposition of dividing our concerns this way. The presupposition can be put like this: as agents, we seek to be rational; to the extent that we are rational, we are concerned with our agency and its results to the extent that they can be shaped by our rational thought; to the extent that results of our agency could not be affected by greater rationality, we should rationally regard them as like the results of someone else’s agency or like a natural event. (Williams 1993, 256)

Williams holds this idea to be “very importantly wrong,” and states that his own examples should be read as seeking “to press the point that, in more than one way, my involvement in my action and its results goes beyond the relation I have to it as an *ex ante* rational deliberator” (Williams 1993, 256).

These statements call to mind an element within Williams’ account that may well have been downplayed, if not ignored, by many of those engaged in developing their own positions regarding moral luck—especially where the focus is on its relation to the Control Principle. It is noteworthy that in issuing them he is drawing attention in a quite specific manner to the temporal aspect of what, on his view, it would mean to fully grasp the problem. His point, as I read it, is that even after—supposing this to be achievable—the troubling implications of moral luck for our understanding of morality itself have been worked through in one way or another (and with one outcome or another), there will remain something about the diachronic relation in which an evaluatively engaged human individual stands to their own past decisions and actions, along with their consequences, that runs counter to the supposed ultimate purpose of morality as a system, at least as Williams himself critically construes the latter.

That supposed purpose, we should remind ourselves, is, for Williams, to answer to an impulse we tend to have to think of our evaluative relationship to instances of our own rational moral agency in the sort of practical-ethical terms that would be appropriate if we were viewing such matters from some kind of abstractly rational and impersonal (“God’s-eye”) standpoint. Williams’ own aim, by contrast, is to stress the integrity and continuity of the evaluatively engaged, yet temporally situated, human individual in terms that insist on acknowledging a meaningful relationship between *ex ante* and *ex post* perspectives on instances of practical moral decision making. In particular, because the consequences of our past actions can, and sometimes do, turn out to be at odds with what we envisaged when we decided to act in the ways that resulted in them, we find ourselves confronted by facts about our own past agential involvements that we ourselves can still feel compelled to “own.” Moreover, this is so even though it has since become clear to us that the evaluative significance they carry bears traces of one form of contingent determination or another. Indeed, it would seem that for Williams, the assertion of such a relationship to our own agential pasts as being in some way important to our wider (both psychologically and meta-evaluatively motivated) sense of what it means to be an evaluatively involved human being is key to showing just why the conception of morality he is criticizing should be regarded as problematically simplistic.



In short, then, by reintroducing into our picture of moral agency a conception of human beings as evaluatively engaged in ways that cut across the divisions associated with a narrow focus on *ex ante* rational deliberation, Williams reminds us that there is an irreducibly diachronic dimension of evaluativity in play in human affairs. And this is not just a matter of highlighting, as he would see it, the overly rationalistic character of certain familiar sorts of account of ethical decision making when viewed from this particular angle. The point is also being made that this dimension goes beyond what can be satisfactorily accommodated in analyses of moral luck insofar as these concentrate on the implications—be they sceptical or not—for the status of rational ethical decision making and agency viewed in exclusively *ex ante* terms.<sup>1</sup>

This specific line of thinking finds a strong echo in the analysis of claims of the sort normally characterized as appeals to moral exceptionalism. The issues and controversies surrounding the latter arise because we, or at least some of us, tend to find it *prima facie* acceptable for certain individuals or groups to be treated as subject to forms of moral accountability of an attenuated or amplified kind relative to the standard normative criteria operative in the community, once circumstantial considerations of an appropriate kind have been determined to be in play. As with moral luck, it can be argued that the element responsible for disrupting the stability of how our evaluative frameworks map on to actual cases is something that risks entailing scepticism about the very possibility of meaningful moral evaluation, and that there are, therefore, good reasons to want to counter this: for example, by showing that it remains consistent at some level with a pragmatically qualified adherence to a systematically normative conception of moral accountability.<sup>2</sup> However, just like with that issue, it can be argued that pursuing this sort of mitigatory approach will not suffice to reconcile it with the abstractly impersonal (“God’s-eye”) standpoint

1. For example, one might think that the sense of arbitrariness brought into view by the notion of moral luck is open to significant mitigation—say, by an appeal to a more contextually conditioned account of moral accountability and practical-epistemic competence, or by arguing, like Pritchard (2005), that the whole phenomenon concerns luck of an epistemic rather than a substantively ethical kind. This would suggest that by making certain conceptual adjustments we can defuse the suspicion created, of there being grounds for legitimate scepticism about the overall coherence of our notion of moral accountability. The above clarifications offered by Williams convey the thought that there is an aspect of his concerns, central to his own account of ethics, that remains untouched by such considerations.

2. Due to the lack of any serious philosophical discussion comparable to that surrounding moral luck, this possibility has to be taken as implicit in what our informal understanding tells us about how such analogous lines of argument might unfold.

on morality Williams seeks to put in question, or with the aspiration towards an ultimately just world that he takes to motivate the latter.

This is because the idea that claims to moral exceptionality represent something other than a wholesale collapse of our evaluative frameworks into something purely descriptive (such as would then threaten to entail sceptical reductionism about ethical matters) implies a meta-evaluative stance.<sup>3</sup> Such a stance, applied by us to a putative bearer of moral valency, makes reference at one and the same time to how, from the standpoint of ethical evaluation, things currently look, given that certain exceptionality-generating circumstances have indeed arisen, and how they would have appeared to us had no such circumstances come into play. It is just because we judge the evaluation we would have made under the standard conditions to be inappropriate under the actually obtaining ones that a claim to exceptionality is realistically entertainable. This means that there is a further level of evaluation in play that only comes into the picture in response to the fact of the actual circumstances being the ones that obtain, but there is also—as a necessary accompaniment or foil—the counterfactual scenario according to which no such second-order evaluation would have come into play at all, as the first-order framework of evaluation would have been sufficient by default to generate an adequate evaluative perspective on its own.

What is significant here is that what defines the connection between these two scenarios is the obtaining-or-not-obtaining of some set of facts about what happened, corresponding to what needed to happen—from the point of view of causal sufficiency—for the non-standard circumstances to now obtain. In this instance (as distinct from cases of moral luck), the demand for a squaring up of these two perspectives lies not in any understanding of what it means (psychologically and evaluatively) to be-and-have-been an agent whose actions have acquired a significance now above and beyond that prefigured at the moment of *ex ante* rational decision making. Instead, it lies in the realization that anyone accepting such a claim to moral exceptionality is implicitly committed to also embracing a causal story: about how, in some particular case, a course of events unfolded whose outcome was that the ethical considerations informing our evaluations shifted away from being straightforwardly normative (in default terms). Our understanding of our present evaluative situation thus makes ineliminable reference

3. This surely also holds true for Williams' position on moral luck: he is not appealing to a notion of trans-temporal personal or agential integrity merely out of respect for brutally psychological facts; rather, it is because he assigns a greater value to operating as a human being in terms that fully acknowledge this feature than to the alternative.

to two possible worlds: one in which no meta-evaluative stance is needed, which itself did actually obtain prior to those events, and one in which a meta-evaluative stance is called for, which has since come to actually obtain in their wake. What relates these, then, is a diachronically constituted difference between the state of things *ex ante* and *ex post*. This differential relation hinges on the events themselves, whose character may be presumed to be contingent, since if it were not so we would have problems explaining why it was not already prefigured in the default ethical framework itself.<sup>4</sup>

One apparent difference between what moral luck theorists and proponents of moral exceptionality are dealing with is that while the former tend to focus on how luck enters into our assessment of actions with reference to their consequences, and thus to imply, as a minimum, some sort of qualified commitment to metaethical consequentialism, the latter are subject to no such constraint. This is because it is the consequences of antecedent events (rather than of actions or practical decisions) that are responsible there for exerting a diachronically disruptive influence on what would otherwise presumably amount to a stable ongoing evaluative scenario. However, this contrast is illusory. Moral luck in its circumstantial form need not be thought of as specifically tied to the ways in which the vagaries of chance can impact on our moral assessments of the consequences that our actions turn out to actually have had: it is entirely plausible to think of them as also affecting the significance we are prepared to attach to character traits, or to actions in and of themselves. After all, circumstances may indeed conspire to make it the case that a character trait first takes on one valency and then another, as when there is a transition between peace and war. Equally, actions regarded as good or bad at a given time without any reference to their actual or expected consequences might—just like the cases of simply intending to act that they may be taken to be expressions of—conceivably show up with an altered valency at other times, given changes of a sufficiently structural sort to the larger human situation in play.<sup>5</sup>

4. When it comes to how such a story should be conceptualized from the standpoint of wider philosophical concerns about how causal explanatoriness works when taken to bear specifically and exclusively on events in the past, we have at our disposal an illuminating precedent in the Finnish logician G. H. von Wright's formal model of how certain modal valencies (necessity, impossibility) can be thought of as on some occasions emerging diachronically. While there is insufficient space to explore this here, it is worth noting that what is striking about this model is that it is in principle consistent with, and arguably also lends support to, a position that holds such stories to be only retrospectively intelligible (see: von Wright 1984).

5. A fuller elaboration of this line of metaethical argument would of course be desirable here, but is precluded by considerations of space.

For the sake of the present discussion at least, such considerations may be taken to imply that what we are dealing with in both of the above cases are forms of ethical diachronicity that need not be seen as linked to any specific metaethical stance of the sort that would identify the underlying locus of ethical value exclusively with actions themselves, the character traits they reveal, or their consequences. Where metaethics is concerned, that then allows us to focus on a different dimension of concern, this being the debate over how ethical evaluations and commitments are to be construed relative to facts and their practical consequences.

Before proceeding further in that direction, I wish to point briefly to the third area in which ethical diachronicity potentially arises as an issue, which concerns the idea of ethical watersheds. I have in mind cases where, at least on a certain reading of their putative significance, our entire structure of evaluative commitment is forced to undergo sudden or gradual change of a radical and/or systemic kind, and where this occurs in conjunction with developments in the world that, if they could have been anticipated earlier, would presumably have led to the necessary adaptations to our overall set of commitments already having been made "in advance of the fact," so to speak. This idea may well strike us as familiar on account of its being presupposed in certain ways of interpreting historical events of note, especially where the latter are taken to present humanity with dramatically new ethical challenges (e.g. the development and use of WMDs, the employment of modern technology and logistics to facilitate the genocidal mass-extinction of human beings, etc.).

On the other hand, such cases raise a difficult issue, since in many instances not everyone will agree that the events in question constitute such a watershed, and whether they do so or not is also frequently influenced by whether, or how far, they take their own lives to have been directly or indirectly impacted by what has occurred. Moreover, this point is one that we surely meet with to some extent in the previous cases of putative ethical diachronicity addressed here, too. For example, a group of persons living their lives in a way that happens to be more or less insulated from the sorts of action that might, by their very nature, be taken to wrongly assume that no unforeseen ethical significance will arise further down the line, arguably have less of a reason to acknowledge moral luck as a serious issue in ethics than others, and those whose own lives have unfolded in a wholly uneventful way to date are likely to struggle to see any intuitive sense in the idea of moral exceptionality, at least compared to those who have actually undergone life-changing experiences of a morally significant kind themselves. To the extent that

this may be taken to be a common feature of the various scenarios we are considering, it suggests that where ethical diachronicity more generally is concerned, whether or not there are examples we can actually point to (as in play at a given time for a given domain) could well be a function of what changes have or have not occurred up to that time, such as bear either on that specific area of evaluative concern or on reality viewed in a more all-encompassing evaluative light.

### 3. ETHICAL DIACHRONICITY AND THE MINIMAL AXIOLOGICAL NON-TRIVIALITY REQUIREMENT: SOME METAETHICAL IMPLICATIONS

That the ethical valences we are inclined to attach in one way or another to human conduct are subject to ongoing adjustment to reflect changes of circumstance seems, from the viewpoint of axiology, to be obviously, though not necessarily non-trivially, true. What is not clear, in particular, is how such valences might come to be altered in ways that would count as structurally significant, in the sense of reflecting more than mere changes of degree (of evaluative salience or force). Naturally, no one would deny that human evaluative priorities shift as certain considerations come more clearly into view while others drop away, as more or less pressing or vital. The challenge posed by the concept of ethical diachronicity, I would suggest, rather lies in making sense of the thought that, as a minimum, the very ordering that defines our values could somehow be responsive to events (or other kinds of happening) that we take to be contingent, and which we are committed to thinking of as uncontroversially helping to make up the factual realm.<sup>6</sup> The difficulty this creates for the proponent of factualism as metaethical stance is that to say that the occurrences in question are contingent seems intuitively tantamount to saying that they do not in and of themselves embody precisely the sort of underlying order—be it something about the natural world or not, and be it factually constituted or not—that could plausibly be taken to define, motivate, or ground our substantive ethical concerns and any systematic relations internal to these. At the same time, I will argue below that the distinctions we are most familiar with when it comes to attempting to formulate a conception of just

6. The thought here is that it cannot be enough to just point to cases where, over time, it transpires that we are somewhat more engaged ethically by X and somewhat less so by Y, where these correspond to distinct or competing yardsticks of value or criteria of ethical evaluation (i.e. “values”). Appealing to just that sort of variability will make it hard to dispel the suspicion that what we are dealing with are no more than changes evinced on the surface of our lived experience of our own evaluative engagement—an “axiological epiphenomenon” of sorts, in which evaluative salience simply tracks subjective shifts of attention and awareness.

such an ordering show up as problematic in the present context, given such a minimal axiological non-triviality requirement.

On the one hand, we have the distinction between what counts as axiologically fundamental and what does not, which involves thinking of value in terms similar to those employed in certain other domains of philosophical inquiry, such as metaphysics and epistemology. This, of course, is *prima facie* meaningful if we are already committed to a version of the metaethical factulist position that holds that value directly reflects forms of ordering in the world that are taken to be uncovered in these other domains. However, what tends to count as motivating the equivalent distinction in the latter is precisely a paradigm of fundamentality that associates the fundamental with the unchanging (or unchangeable)—be it metaphysical essence or an ideal of unconditional epistemic certainty—and the non-fundamental with the changing (or changeable). To embrace such a distinction in the present context is therefore tantamount to simply asserting that what is of primary or paramount importance, where value is concerned, is just what is given as part of a structure of evaluative commitment that can be synchronically articulated, and what is of secondary importance is just what is only comprehensible with reference to diachronic considerations. Yet the effect of this is surely to close off further debate about the role of ethical diachronicity by tying our conception of value to a structural paradigm that already entails that it can only ever have a certain sort of limited order-conferring significance. It therefore creates a scenario in which someone in possession of a metaethical stance that takes value to be directly aligned with the fundamental/non-fundamental distinction in some other area of philosophy can feel quite confident that putative examples of ethical diachronicity of the sort canvassed above will present no serious challenge to their metaethical commitments, since the very fact that they pertain to matters of diachronic rather than synchronic ethical intelligibility will be taken as sufficient to indicate that they cannot be of anything more than secondary importance. Conversely, someone not entertaining such a stance but nevertheless in the grip of this same paradigm will be faced with the seemingly intractable question of what it means that they do *not* see value as being ordered in this kind of way. Yet it might well turn out to be the case that there *is* something about the diachronically articulable dimension of value that itself would justify rejecting a metaethical stance that relies on this paradigm. In that case the distinction between what counts as axiologically fundamental and what does not will need to be radically rethought if it is still to have any bearing on such matters. Such considerations suggest that as it stands, this simply cannot be the right

distinction to invoke as a basis for determining how, and in what fashion, ethical concerns that are diachronically rather than synchronically intelligible might be said to figure non-trivially in human affairs and human life.

On the other hand, seen from the perspective of metaethical factualism, the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic value, which frequently figures as a structurally significant notion when discussing how our various sorts of axiological commitment are conceptually organized relative to one another, hardly takes us further in this regard. Following Rønnow-Rasmussen (2002, 6–17), we may understand this at its most rudimentary level to be a conflation of two conceptually distinct distinctions, one of which concerns whether or not something's having a value is derived from something else's having a value, while the other pertains to whether its value is a function of its own self-standing character or of relations in which it stands.<sup>7</sup> This then gives us two conceptual pairings: the distinction between non-derivative and derivative forms of non-relationally constituted value, and that between non-derivative and derivative forms of relationally constituted value.<sup>8</sup>

For the distinction between non-derivative and derivative forms of non-relationally constituted value to serve as a point of reference for making sense of any role that facts might play in defining, motivating, or grounding our evaluative concerns in some axiologically non-trivial way, there must be a plausible way to coherently map cases of that distinction onto facts of one sort or another: in short, a factual correlate of the distinction itself. The problem here is that the sole plausible contender for fulfilling such a role is the distinction between facts that necessarily hold true of some putative bearer of value and ones that only do so contingently. But where does this get us? After all, to say that a set of facts obtain necessarily for some bearer X is to say that the description of X made true by those facts retains that status rigidly across all possible worlds. And this is just tantamount to saying that we cannot comprehend its truth value ever changing or its ever having changed. That, then, surely implies a commitment to a synchronically rather than diachronically articulated understanding

7. Each of these distinctions is, of course, potentially subject to extensive qualification from the standpoint of first-order formal-axiological theorising, as Rønnow-Rasmussen's discussion itself makes clear. However, for reasons of space I can only operate with this very basic formulation here.

8. I avoid Rønnow-Rasmussen's terminology of "final" and "non-final" value here, as it is vulnerable to being misinterpreted as carrying temporal connotations. These risk obscuring the discussion of diachronicity that is the focus of the present article.

of what makes it the thing or phenomenon it is, and if that is so, it is hard to see how it could help cast light on notions of ethical diachronicity.

The situation seems a little different, to be sure, when we turn to the other version or sub-variant of the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic value. For the distinction between non-derivative and derivative forms of relationally constituted value to serve as a useful point of reference here, what we need is an appropriate account of the difference that certain relations can make. This will have to be one possessing sufficient clarificatory power with respect to the axiological considerations in play while also being consistent with the thought that the obtaining or non-obtaining of such relations is a diachronic rather than a synchronic affair.

In the case of instances of moral luck, it seems fairly intuitive to say that what occurs is that we encounter cases of emergent value or disvalue of a relational sort, which come about due to contextual changes—changes that unfold in ways that bear, unexpectedly, on the *ex post* significance of an action's consequences or its intrinsic character, or on that of the agential character traits it discloses. In short, some novel relations are taken to have emerged between what counts as "having-been-done" at a level that reflects a comparatively more straightforward construal of the action or conduct involved on the one hand, and certain additional emerging considerations on the other. The latter are such as to demand to be reflected in a more highly context-dependent relational construal of what it is, of agential and ethical significance, that is taken to have occurred, and this new composite phenomenon consisting of the original (relationally constituted) action and its relations to the new context is found to carry a new valency according to our evaluative standards. But even here it is not quite the case that the very ordering that defines our values has turned out in such cases to be diachronically responsive, in the sense of being responsive to events that we take to be contingent. What actually seems to have taken place is just that some new relational facts have come into play, that elicit a distinct evaluative response from our overall structure of evaluative commitment just because the sum of relevant facts of that sort is now different from what it antecedently was.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, viewed from the perspective of meta-ethical factualism this would imply an inexplicable division between two sets of relational facts fulfilling somewhat different functions. On the one hand, there will be those that serve to define, motivate, or ground our initial

9. It is not that the same set of facts now carry a different significance as such, where this could only plausibly be explained as issuing from a change in the underlying ordering principle informing our evaluations.



or default evaluative concerns in relational terms, and on the other, there will be those that constitute relational input of a novel, situationally specific kind. The difficulty will be that in the absence of some essentialist commitments (of a factually articulable kind) that cannot simply be assumed for the sake of theoretical convenience, we have no reason not to think of both sets of relational facts as obtaining contingently. This then makes it hard to explain why one set count as constitutive of a default evaluative position, but the other only as coming into play on the back of novel developments. (A related point seems to hold where ethical watersheds are concerned: it remains mysterious why a certain totality of contingently obtaining facts manages to sustain a stable system of evaluation even as significant changes continually occur in the world, whilst another, brought into actuality by some radically unforeseen new development, requires that the system itself be radically reconstituted.)

This leaves us with cases of purported moral exceptionality. It seems to me that advocates of moral exceptionalism tend to construe these intuitively in one or other of two distinct ways: either as historically unique happenings that just happen to have affected some people more than others, or as cases in which there is some reason to think that an exceptionality-conferring context has arisen for a given individual or group because of who they are, given their particular (and in some cases uniquely specific) life-history up to that point.<sup>10</sup> In both sorts of case we are dealing with some sort of notion of differential exposure to contingently occurring events in the factual realm, the difference being whether the source of this differential dimension is located in how human beings happen, as a matter of “pure” luck, to stand relative to certain events and outcomes, or in something that, in spite of being contingent in its own terms, has somehow come to define those people themselves (i.e. a historically disclosed structure of concerns specific to them that confers a distinctive identity and meta-evaluative status, from which a changed configuration of possibilities for the moral evaluation of behaviour then follows). The difficulty for the metaethical factualist is that under either scenario such cases will present themselves as individually unique constellations of factual commitment, making it hard to see how they can be seen as anything other than implicationally inert where any normatively action-guiding evaluative considerations are concerned. They may tell us that what we took to be an ongoing set of regularities in respect of human behaviour and factual knowledge,

10. Of course, that distinction may not be a hard and fast one, and raises deep and complex philosophical questions itself.

capable of generating action-guiding normative output, is now superseded by events. But the very uniqueness either of those events themselves or of their effects on a particular group or individual, or the sheer specificity of that impact when viewed as having come to be further defined by its place in some particular life-history or other, would not seem to be the sort of thing that could be expected to generate ethical implications capable of carrying over (normatively) into contexts of ongoing human engagement.

The above considerations make it hard to see how one could avoid embracing the non-factualist metaethical stance as the only remaining way to keep the distinction between non-derivative and derivative forms of non-relationally or relationally constituted value intelligibly in play. The thought here would be that by saying that this distinction only applies at the level of deontic modality—in the form of claims to the effect that X conveys an “ought” only because Y does, whereas Y does so in and of itself—we are not making any kind of alethically modal claim. The suggestion is that it is precisely the alethic character of such claims that requires them to be understood as obtaining in an unchanging and therefore synchronically modal fashion.

Yet this switch to a non-factualist metaethical stance then faces its own problem. This is because in talking about ethical diachronicity we are typically (if not invariably) talking about shifts of evaluative commitment and understanding that occur in response to factual developments in the world, not self-generated shifts arising in a kind of “free-floating” way within frameworks of irreducibly non-factual commitment themselves. The issue here, then, is that this kind of non-factualist stance makes the idea of facts playing some sort of causal role in bringing about such shifts of understanding at an axiologically non-trivial level unintelligible. If we stipulate that in order for ethical diachronicity to be axiologically non-trivial it must at the very least involve significant demarcatory changes pertaining to where the boundary separating non-derivative from derivative forms of non-relationally or relationally constituted value falls, then it is hard to see how factual developments could be invoked in any useful way to shed causal-explanatory light on how it came to be the case that these demarcatory determinations shifted, given that the latter are understood to be separate from the realm of facts.

That makes it seem like we are then committed by metaethical non-factualism to a rejection of the distinction between non-derivative and derivative value in any contexts or domains where we would wish to say that ethical diachronicity is operative. But such an outcome does no more than land us on the other horn of a dilemma whose first horn was the metaethical factualist scenario explored above, in which a proper maintaining of this

same distinction was found to leave no intelligible room for axiologically non-trivial ethical diachronicity itself. It would thus appear that while factualism tells us that we can only keep this distinction in play by ruling out ethical diachronicity, non-factualism tells us that we can only keep ethical diachronicity in play at the cost of rendering that same distinction problematic (in the sense of its being mysterious from the point of view of causal explainability).

#### 4. WITTGENSTEIN ON FRAMING AND DIACHRONICITY

Given the challenges arising for such metaethical stances, it makes sense to consider the potential applicability to this area of the later Wittgenstein's distinctive—though somewhat sketchy—conception of how, more generally, framing commitments and empirico-factual beliefs combine together in ways that change over time. The latter forms an element within his very late line of thinking about scepticism and its limits in *On Certainty* (Wittgenstein 1969). Its appeal in the present context lies in the thought that it seems to furnish a stance resistant to characterization in metaethical terms as either straightforwardly factualist or non-factualist.

Wittgenstein's remarks set out to explore a diverse range of instances of non-epistemically constituted forms of certainty manifested at the level of our beliefs, of the kind commonly referred to now as "bedrock certainties" or "hinge commitments." These present themselves as putatively fact-stating empirical propositions, but their real function within the context of our involvement in some given form of life or other is, Wittgenstein suggests, often quite different, in that it is essentially regulative—or, to use his preferred term, "grammatical." We embrace them as unquestionably valid, but not because we judge them true either in the manner of the elementary epistemic commitments considered fundamental by proponents of atomistic foundationalism, and also not because of their role in any holistically conceived coherentist structure of purely epistemic commitment. Instead, the thought is that we do so because the constraints thus imposed on what may be considered a legitimate object of empirico-factual epistemic commitment are required to be in place as a precondition of (and in this sense part of the necessary framework for) our being involved in certain ways of going on with our lives, acting and reacting as we do. Whilst the exact implications of Wittgenstein's conception have been much debated, it seems uncontroversial to point out that such ways of living—or "forms of life"—manifest their significance in, amongst other things, the scope and force of the structures of evaluative commitment we are able to sustain in the contexts they furnish, and in the consequent impossibility

of imagining a comparably worthwhile life for ourselves without such regulative commitments being in place.<sup>11</sup> In effect, we hold certain commitments that, when propositionally expressed, resemble factual ones, but our doing so is motivated by non-epistemic considerations. It is required if we are to satisfy the conditions under which a certain way of living, acting, etc., becomes possible for us—one that also happens to be the one we are actually involved in. This sort of validation can also be construed in explicitly axiological terms: we might say that the non-derivative value we ascribe to a given way of living, acting, etc., from the standpoint of our actually being inextricably involved in it is passed on to any commitments of this kind, just inasmuch as these are presupposed as regulative (for us) in that same context of involvement.

Now, a significant feature of the later Wittgenstein's notion of bedrock certainty is the idea that this is subject to temporal evolution in the light of human circumstances in ways distinct from, but interconnected with, the processes of epistemic revision to which our empirically accountable and putatively factual commitments are subject.<sup>12</sup> We may first note how, in a general kind of way, he seems open to, and is explicit about, the possibility of our concept-using practices being subverted by contingencies emerging in the surrounding world:

Certain events would put me into a position in which I could not go on with the old language-game any further. In which I was torn away from the sureness of the game. Indeed, doesn't it seem obvious that the possibility of a language-game is conditioned by certain facts? (Wittgenstein 1969, § 617)

At the same time, he expresses sympathy for the view that there are structures of commitment that must be understood as constituted holistically in a certain kind of way, such that within them any potentially revisable factual claims form only one element, as when he writes that:

I have arrived at the rock bottom of my convictions. And one might almost say that these foundation-walls are carried by the whole house. (Wittgenstein 1969, § 248)

11. This implicitly evaluative dimension is more explicitly conveyed in his remarks on the nature of religious belief from the 1930s, which prefigure this overall line of thinking on his part (see Wittgenstein 1967).

12. That distinctness is perhaps most evident in his somewhat scattered remarks pertaining to the notion of world-picture (*Weltbild*). For insightful reconstructive analysis of the latter, see Schulte (1988).

What these two statements would seem to jointly imply is the idea that changes to the facts involved may, in certain circumstances, translate into changes with regard to the very concept-sustaining practices we are prepared to adhere to—and so, by extension, also to the surrendering of certain bedrock commitments that belong to those same holistically constituted structures, even if their role there was a regulative rather than an empirico-factually descriptive one.

It is natural to consider this in the light of Wittgenstein's well-known sequence of remarks in *On Certainty* featuring his "riverbed analogy." These would seem to be aimed at conveying the idea that the demarcatory boundary between what is open to revision in the way associated with our empirically revisable propositional commitments on the one hand, and what is immune or resistant to that sort of revision in the way associated with our regulative commitments on the other, itself changes, and in a manner consistent with there being a continuously graded rather than sharp distinction between the two kinds of status:

§ 96. It might be imagined that some propositions, of the form of empirical propositions, were hardened and functioned as channels for such empirical propositions as were not hardened but fluid; and that this relation altered with time, in that fluid propositions hardened, and hard ones became fluid.

§ 97. The mythology may change back into a state of flux, the river-bed of thoughts may shift. But I distinguish between the movement of the waters on the river-bed and the shift of the bed itself; though there is not a sharp division of the one from the other.

§ 98. But if someone were to say "So logic too is an empirical science" he would be wrong. Yet this is right: the same proposition may get treated at one time as something to test by experience, at another as a rule of testing.

§ 99. And the bank of that river consists partly of hard rock, subject to no alteration or only to an imperceptible one, partly of sand, which now in one place now in another gets washed away, or deposited. (Wittgenstein 1969)

Before attempting to determine the implications of this for our present concerns, it is worth noting another potentially relevant feature of his approach. This, though, has received significantly less attention than the above, and requires for its exposition two additional elements to be brought into view.

The first is his apparent running together of intrinsically different sorts of propositionally expressible belief in his account of how factual and grammatical elements coexist in the context of such holistic structures of commitment. For example, in the following remark, he offers a list of examples of the sort of propositionally formulated commitments that, as he puts it, “stand fast” for him:

I believe that I have forebears, and that every human being has them. I believe that there are various cities, and, quite generally, in the main facts of geography and history. I believe that the earth is a body on whose surface we move and that it no more suddenly disappears or the like than any other solid body: this table, this house, this tree, etc. If I wanted to doubt the existence of the earth long before my birth, I should have to doubt all sorts of things that stand fast for me. (Wittgenstein 1969, § 234)

Wittgenstein’s suggestion, as I read it, is that while these are propositions whose potentially fact-stating content would otherwise allow for them to be, at least in principle, individually open to doubt and revision (under appropriate epistemic circumstances), the fact of their belonging to a larger structure of commitment obtaining en bloc at the level of his lived (and practice-constituted) engagement with the world suffices to accord them a collectively non-revisable status as immune to doubt. If they are each individually presupposed by that larger structure of commitment, then questioning one or other of them will involve stepping outside of the latter, leaving all others potentially exposed as well. That, in turn, will engender an artificially inflated form of scepticism, at odds with the practice-constituted reality of human life.

It has been argued by A.C. Grayling that some of his examples along these lines invite the accusation that he is guilty of conflating two distinct kinds of proposition, whose inherent relations to the issue of epistemic revisability stand in sharp contrast to one another in a fashion at odds with what the riverbed analogy purports to describe (see Grayling 2008, 130–31). The thought here is that while some of these, given their content, by their very nature express genuinely empirico-factual commitments, others function intrinsically in the regulative kind of way that Wittgenstein himself characterizes as “grammatical,” their purpose being invariably to help sustain a certain internally coherent body of empirico-factual beliefs. The temptation here—to which Grayling, in my view, has succumbed—is to rush to impose a strictly epistemological reading on the

contrasts in play.<sup>13</sup> This can prevent one from noticing a more straightforward (or, at least, less theoretically implicated) sense in which two different sorts of commitment are indeed being placed on the same level. The point is that some of these statements pertain to matters that, in the particular form in which we actually hold them to be the case (and quite apart from whether we do so for the sake of their factual or their regulative significance, or something in between), have only come to obtain over time, and in the wake of events that need not have occurred but did, while others by virtue of their content are required to refer to unchanging features of reality.

The relevant lesson here is that independently of whether a particular propositionally formulated commitment is taken to be performing a putatively fact-stating or a regulative role, its intrinsically synchronic or diachronic character can be on display, thanks to the nature of its ostensibly asserted content. Thus, for at least some propositions, even when figuring in larger contexts of commitment that are such as to entail, on Wittgenstein's account, a grammatical mode of functioning, we can be aware of the synchronically or diachronically articulated character of the truth conditions that will be in play in other contexts in which they might also show up—ones where their role approximates more closely to that of conveying a straightforwardly empirico-factual claim.

The second element that needs highlighting requires that we take note of another aspect of Wittgenstein's approach with implications for how we should construe him as addressing issues connected with diachronicity. This is his exploration of what it would mean to take up the imaginary standpoint of an alternative-reality scenario, where what is imagined is my having come to have commitments at variance from the ones I actually have now, and where this development is not merely a product of some epistemically conditioned shift in my beliefs about the world, but rather marks a response I have quite naturally had to the coming-to-obtain of some radically new facts:

What if something really unheard-of happened?—If I, say, saw houses gradually turning into steam without any obvious cause, if the cattle in the fields stood on their heads and laughed and spoke comprehensible words; if trees gradually changed into men and men into trees. Now, was I right when I said

13. I think that there are broader reasons to be suspicious of such an epistemologically focused interpretative approach where the later Wittgenstein is concerned. However, these lie beyond the scope of the present article.

before all these things happened “I know that that’s a house” etc., or simply “that’s a house” etc.? (Wittgenstein 1969, § 513)

The point of this, made explicit in the remark’s final sentence, is that it allows us to ask whether I would still then recognize these (my currently indubitable commitments, and, along with them, the larger practice-defined structure in virtue of which they have this status) as having been legitimately held to be indubitable by me. Although Wittgenstein poses the question, he does not seek to answer it. Yet the mere asking of it suffices to highlight a significant point of contrast with the remark discussed earlier (§ 234). Whereas it follows clearly from that set of examples that Wittgenstein is prepared, in the relevant contexts and/or circumstances, to endorse contingently coming-to-obtain facts as “standing fast” and playing a role in the constitution of the larger structures of commitment that give sense to the notion of bedrock certainty, in the hypothetically posited reality (in § 513) of a present whose own historical past includes contingently obtaining facts different from those of our own actual one there seems to be no compulsion to assert that an equivalent commitment obtains.

Combined with the first element, the juxtaposition of diachronically distinct scenarios that this second element brings into view seems relevant because it makes possible an approach that, in principle at least, would allow one to properly register the evaluative implications stemming from differences pertaining to temporal perspective. That is to say, it opens up a space for taking seriously the following thought: that the idea that our certainties—be they evaluatively significant or not—might be susceptible to change over time amounts to something quite different when what is to be thus thought of as changing has changed, from what it amounts to when what is to be thus thought of as changing has not actually done so. In the former case, we will inhabit a specific position with respect to temporal standpoint, located *ex post factum* relative to the relevant instance(s) of such change, whereas in the latter there will be no such specifiable temporal standpoint.<sup>14</sup>

14. In modern philosophy, appealing to tense as a basis for temporally perspectival conceptions of meaning and value is a characteristic of thinkers associated with existentialism, such as Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and Heidegger. However, I myself am not seeking to suggest that Wittgenstein was an existentialist of sorts—only that these specific remarks, taken in combination, imply a principled openness to the role that temporally perspectival forms of intelligibility could play in making sense of our changing evaluative commitments. Williams’ focus on how temporal perspectivity and agent integrity interact in the context of moral luck, by contrast, owes a clear debt to Nietzsche.



Wittgenstein's line of thought, as encapsulated above all in his "riverbed-analogy" remarks, is arguably not best understood as offering a novel theoretical stance on the problem that drives the metaethical debate between factualists and non-factualists. Rather, it dissolves that problem by showing that the distinctions regarded by both parties to the dispute as basic and incontrovertible and sharply defined—between what is constituted as certain and unchanging or uncertain and changing in factual (and epistemological) terms and what is so with reference to its performing a regulative (framing) function in Wittgenstein's "grammatical" sense—turn out when properly contextualized in relation to our lives not to be so. But the second aspect of his approach presented above serves to make clear on two levels that this dissolution is not premised on any implicitly synchronic understanding of the commitments involved, be they putatively factual or non-factual ones. Firstly, we can still read off from the ostensibly truth-conditional content of propositions whether they pertain to something that is articulated diachronically or synchronically, so this differentiating feature is retained even as their role shifts in a graded way between the extreme poles of epistemic and non-epistemic modes of commitment. Secondly, the other remarks discussed make clear that Wittgenstein is at least open to the thought that our deep-level commitments may sometimes be temporally perspectival—in the sense of our finding ourselves in situations where possibilities of commitment otherwise not thinkable become so, but only in light of events that, while they have occurred, need not have done so.

Viewed from a Wittgensteinian standpoint thus construed, the intractability of the issues raised by metaethical (non-)factualism as this relates to such putative variants of ethical diachronicity as moral luck, moral exceptionality, and ethical watersheds would appear to be a non-issue, reflecting an artificially imposed set of assumptions about the role of factuality in human understanding of the world more generally. However, while such an outcome may strike us as intuitively persuasive, it is by no means unproblematic.

Whatever illumination Wittgenstein is seeking to achieve (at a level not specifically pertaining to ethical matters) through his remarks about the nature of certainty is, I believe, complicated by the fact that if we interpret his remarks as intended to function descriptively as opposed to heuristically, they generate a problem of self-referentiality. It seems reasonable to think that this will also then carry through to the more specific ethics-related concerns in relation to which we have been seeking to determine their applicability. The point is that if the certainties that human beings rely on in their lives do indeed inhabit a realm of graded distinctions between

epistemic and non-epistemic variants, with the same propositionally expressible commitments sometimes shifting their own status from being located towards one end of this continuum to being closer to the other end, then where does this leave Wittgenstein's remarks themselves? Given what he appears to be asserting to be the case, his own remarks cannot themselves be assumed, on pain of inconsistency, to be either strictly or unchangingly factual, or to be performing a strictly or unchangingly framing role. What is their own status?

Such an outcome seems comparable in some respects to the problem of self-referentiality that shows up in this philosopher's earlier thinking at the level of propositions putatively asserting truths about the nature of propositional discourse itself (when construed exclusively as a logically perspicuous mode of representation of reality). What this led to in the *Tractatus*, of course, was a series of declarations, themselves outwardly propositional in form, about what can be shown but not said, about the limits of language and/or reality, and about the nonsensicality of certain sorts of proposition, together with the metaphor of ascending a ladder only to throw it away, with an implied endorsement of some sort of philosophical quietism.

In the case of our present area of concern, such problems of self-referentiality would seem to be further sharpened by the fact that we are dealing with a position whose concern is diachronicity as it relates to ethical matters. That is to say, applied to the debate about metaethical factualism and non-factualism as it relates to such putative cases of axiologically non-trivial ethical diachronicity as moral luck, moral exceptionality, and ethical watersheds, Wittgenstein would seem to be saying that not only what may count in one context as a (more or less) factual commitment of a synchronically articulated sort, but also what may do so (more or less) as one that is diachronically articulated, may, in another context, instead function (more or less) as a "grammatical" framing commitment. This would mean that what we take to articulate a temporally perspectival structure of evaluative commitment (more or less) manifesting a response to certain facts' having contingently come to obtain in one set of life-circumstances may be taken to express a (more or less) regulative presuppositional commitment in another. The difficulty this presents is that as a statement about the nature of value it, too, will appear problematically self-referential. Presumably, to coherently express a stance on how these different status options relate to one another it must not itself be an instance of one or other of them. And were the claim that our value-commitments exhibit such a variability in respect of their status to itself be subject to a similar form

of variation (between the factual and the non-factual, and with this between the temporally perspectival and temporally non-perspectival), then the question would arise of when to read it as expressing a second-order axiological commitment that counts in a given context as situationally (and so, in some strange sense, also factually) determined, and when to treat it as one that is itself an expression of regulative presuppositional concerns.

### 5. THROWING AWAY THE LADDER

To the extent that one finds such a (Wittgensteinian) position plausible, it would therefore seem to indeed entail a certain “throwing away of the ladder” of philosophical analysis.<sup>15</sup> However, in contrast to the more absolute variants of quietism that come with certain readings of the *Tractatus*, I wish to suggest that this need not leave us with nothing to say. There can be, I think, a meaningful consideration of putative cases of ethical diachronicity in other ways, via personal histories and fictional narratives—especially where these exhibit content that possesses a specific relevance to the topic of how certain metaethical concerns might be thought to bear on our understanding of ethical diachronicity itself.

The clue to this lies in the philosophically troubling feature raised at the end of the Section 2. There, it was asserted that putative instances of ethical watersheds are liable to being contested, as there is no general consensus about when these have occurred—in that different individuals and groups will have varying perspectives on the significance of what has happened, given their varying levels of exposure to the events in question and their consequences. It was also argued that something similar holds true for cases of moral luck and moral exceptionality, inasmuch as individuals or groups whose own lives happen to have proved eventful in certain sorts of ethically disruptive way in some given domain are likely to be more open to acknowledging the possibility of further developments there, or in closely related areas, as carrying transformative implications for their existing patterns of moral assessment. As was noted, this makes the availability of actual examples a function of the changes that have (or have not) occurred as consequential in our individual or collective lives up to the time in question.

One response is to embrace this as an inevitable constraint imposed by the phenomenon of ethical diachronicity itself, and accept that all meaningful talk of instances of moral luck, exceptionality, and watersheds is bound

15. That is to say, a “throwing away of the ladder” specifically where the analysis of the metaethical challenges posed by ethical diachronicity in the form discussed here are concerned, and not a total rejection of philosophy as a mode of investigation.

to devolve onto appeals to experience that are in some sense dismissible as anecdotal, since they require us to draw on personal, or at least community-specific, histories. On such an approach, the significance of any such dismissal will be disarmed by the thought that rather than being a mark of theoretical vacuity, this is just what we should expect, given the nature of what is at stake in theoretical terms here. The phenomenon just is one that, if and when it occurs at all, will exhibit some element of irreducible, radical contingency. In effect, it forces one to choose between an affirmation of its ethical (and broader axiological) significance made from the standpoint of a temporally perspectival (*ex post factum*) mode of intelligibility, and a principled—but arguably potentially dogmatic—rejection of it as ethically and axiologically vacuous on grounds that can be presumed to be synchronically articulated.

Even so, a further dimension is, I believe, opened up by appeals to fictional narratives of the kind that we encounter—above all, but not exclusively—in literature. This, I should stress, is not the one that one might expect, given the role that philosophical work in this area has tended to play in contributing to contemporary ethical discourse. The latter, especially when following in the wake of Stanley Cavell’s writings (see, e.g., Cavell 1979), has principally consisted in attempts to broaden our imaginative grasp of the varied possibilities of human ethical engagement via a descriptive approach focused on what particular human situations, and the forms of situatedness relevant to these, are themselves thought to reveal.<sup>16</sup> By contrast, I prefer to draw attention to how, on some occasions, fictional narratives bring ethical diachronicity more sharply into view by evoking suitable overarching contexts of intelligibility, where these go beyond what is specific to the lives and histories of particular persons or communities and, as such, may carry a wider resonance. They can do this when the narratives unfolded are framed by a larger cultural perspective or world-view that is in some way itself conducive to a grasp of what ethical diachronicity involves, rather than being one whose implicit value commitments make it structurally resistant to the latter. In this regard, and given also their broader historico-cultural significance, I would venture to suggest that the narrative structures of Homeric epic poetry would seem to represent an ideal case in point.<sup>17</sup>

16. For a general survey and wide-ranging discussion of this, see Hämäläinen (2016a, 2016b).

17. For an illustration of this, see the discussion of Homer’s *Iliad* presented in Humphries (2024).

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# The Issue of the Pragmatist Sources of Post-Truth, Considered in the Light of William James’ Definition of Truth

*Marek Wójtowicz*

**ABSTRACT** “The post-truth era” is one of the terms characteristic of modern times. It describes the widespread acceptance of deception and manipulation in public life, especially in the mass media. The investigation presented here first seeks to clarify the phenomenon of post-truth, on the basis of an analysis of those authors who have proposed and popularized the concept, such as Steve Tesich, Ralph Keyes and Matthew d’Ancona. Next, it explores the thesis put forward by Dariusz Juruś regarding the influence of the philosophy of pragmatism on the development of post-truth. In order to evaluate that thesis, William James’ conception is examined, including his definition of truth, his radical empiricism, and the idea of a genuine option. It turns out that the American philosopher’s pragmatism can undoubtedly not be counted among the sources of post-truth.

**KEYWORDS** genuine option; James, William; post-truth; pragmatism; radical empiricism

The concept of post-truth was first used in 1992 by Steve Tesich in his essay *A Government of Lies*, to be subsequently introduced into academic discourse in 2004 by American columnist Ralph Keyes, the author of *The Post-Truth Era: Dishonesty and Deception in Contemporary Life*. The diagnosis of modernity made therein proved so accurate that the concept soon began to be widely used to explain numerous topical socio-political phenomena. Seven years ago, *Oxford Dictionaries* declared “post-truth” the word of the year.

An analysis of many dimensions of social life, especially in the world of Western culture, indicates a gradual distancing from such an essential human value as truth. This disturbing phenomenon undoubtedly calls for in-depth reflection to both formulate an accurate description of the situation and to find remedies to it, since the further expansion of post-truth may—it seems—undermine the very foundations of our civilization. The research presented here aims to evaluate the thesis that the philosophy of pragmatism exerted a significant influence on this process we are seeing happening today.

#### 1. POST-TRUTH: DEFINITION AND CONDITIONS

It is difficult to produce a precise definition of the concept of post-truth. In his analysis, Tesich pointed to the reluctance of modern people to seek the truth—especially when that truth could prove uncomfortable to them. That is why they approve of the half-truths and deceptions provided to them by the media (Tesich 1992, 12–13). Keyes, on the other hand, emphasized the fundamental transformation of moral attitudes toward lying that has taken place in recent decades:

Even though there have always been liars, lies have usually been told with hesitation, a dash of anxiety, a bit of guilt, a little shame, at least some sheepishness. Now, clever people that we are, we have come up with rationales for tampering with truth so we can dissemble guilt-free. I call it *post-truth*. (Keyes 2004, 12–13)

In turn, Matthew d’Ancona—a journalist who has contributed greatly to popularizing the idea of post-truth—attempted to grasp its essence using the following words: “the triumph of the visceral over the rational, the deceptively simple over the honestly complex” (d’Ancona 2017, 20), and declared: “Specifically, I explore the declining value of truth as society’s reserve currency, and the infectious spread of pernicious relativism disguised as legitimate scepticism” (d’Ancona 2017, 2).



Producing a more accurate definition of the concept of post-truth will become possible after we have invoked some typical situations that it is used to describe. It is worth focusing on the examples by means of which the abovementioned authors illustrated their theses. As such, Tesich refers to three political scandals that directly involved the highest seat of political power—that of the President of the United States. After the Watergate scandal came to light, Richard Nixon was forced to resign, which, according to Tesich, was a triumph for democracy and the American commitment to truth. The public, however, was not willing to let any more such situations that were so discomforting for citizens arise: “We looked to our government to protect us from the truth” (Tesich 1992, 12). The subsequent fraud scandals involving US presidents—the Iran-Contra Affair under President Ronald Reagan, and the circumstances surrounding the start of the Gulf War under President George H.W. Bush—no longer provoked such strong public reactions. It appeared that allegiance to truth had given way to the acceptance of post-truth.

Many more examples of the spread of post-truth are presented by Keyes. First of all, he refers to the results of numerous studies indicating that modern times are far more saturated with lies than had previously been the case. Keyes summarizes his analysis as follows:

This book’s premise is that we may be no more prone to making things up than our ancestors were, but we are better able to get away with deceiving others, more likely to be let off the hook if exposed, and in the process convince ourselves that no harm’s been done. (Keyes 2004, 10–11)

Among the phenomena taken to illustrate this thesis, Keyes includes the popularity of euphemistic terms for lying, the prevalence of minor and major deceptions in autobiographical narratives, and the provision of false data about one’s education (Keyes 2004, 15–80).

For d’Ancona, on the other hand, proof of the victory of post-truth over truth has been provided by two important events—which he called rebellions—which took place in 2016: the election of Donald Trump as U.S. president and Brexit. “Most conspicuously, both insurgencies reflected a new and alarming collapse in the power of truth as an engine of electoral conduct” (d’Ancona 2017, 10). Thus, d’Ancona argues that an important transformation has taken place in the sphere of social communication: the imperative to convey objective truth has been replaced by the requirement of sincerity, and the reporting of facts by appeals to emotions.

How to explicate the reasons for the current spread of post-truth? Tesich blames the ethos of success and self-fulfillment dominant in American

society, which contributes to raising the younger generation in a climate of relativism and produces an inclination to divest oneself of “moral encumbrances,” leading to a loss of the “human spirit.” The educational sources of post-truth are also noted by Keyes. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, psychotherapists on the one hand, and lawyers and politicians on the other, have taken over the role of teachers of morality. To make matters worse, they have become role models, even though the former help their patients create and reinforce “useful myths” about themselves, while the latter, instead of striving to establish the truth (facts), act primarily in favor of the interests of their clients and often directly obstruct the way to the truth, with many demonstrating a quite unheard-of propensity for confabulation and prevarication.<sup>1</sup>

Keyes discerns another reason for the spread of post-truth, this time in the transformation of academia. Dishonesty is becoming prevalent there, not only with students resorting to classroom cheating, but also with professors stooping so low as to put a misleading spin on their own biographies, provide false information during lectures, and even falsify research results: “Many who teach there consider tolerance for deception a sign of intellectual dexterity” (Keyes 2004, 130). According to Keyes, the development of academic post-truth is largely due to the popularity of postmodernist ideas that treat truth as a social construct and replace it with a multitude of “narratives,” which inevitably leads to relativism. This is what d’Ancona agrees with, noting that postmodernists, in their search for an accurate description of the diversity characterizing contemporary social life, have transformed reality into a Baudrillardian hyper-reality, thus blurring the distinction between truth and fiction (d’Ancona 2017, 96–109).

However, Keyes regards the transformation that has taken place in the mass media in recent decades as perhaps the most significant source of post-truth. Deception by writers, journalists and show-business representatives, especially those associated with the movie and television industry, has become standard behavior (Keyes 2004, 149–83). More than a dozen years later, this thesis must be supplemented by a statement about the current dominance of online media, which are undoubtedly at the forefront of creating and disseminating various types of post-truth.

The analyses and conclusions so far referred to can be considered “classical” when it comes to the issue of post-truth. They have been commented on and modified in various ways by subsequent thinkers addressing the issue (Vacura 2020, 10–13). The Polish philosopher Dariusz Juruś (2021, 51)

1. Here, Keyes (2004, 113–29) mentions Al Gore, Bill Clinton, Ronald Reagan, Joe Biden and Arnold Schwarzenegger, among others.

has recognized the philosophy of activism as one of the sources of post-truth: “Contemporary man must be active and stimulated. While truth is the object of contemplation, post-truth is meant to be an incentive for action.” Moreover, in a footnote, he has laid out the bold thesis that “pragmatism also had a significant impact on the concept of truth resp. post-truth. . . Truth is action; . . . The subject is no longer an observer, but becomes a participant in the knowledge-forming process” (Juruś 2021, 51). The lack of reference to other publications leads us to assume that this is Juruś’ original thesis. Although he does not offer any real reasoning to this effect in his text, he has nevertheless raised an issue that is certainly worth conducting a comprehensive analysis of. The research presented in subsequent parts of this article is precisely an attempt to evaluate the thesis asserting the influence of pragmatism on the spread of post-truth. The starting point here will be the idea of truth as formulated by the American philosopher William James.

## 2. WILLIAM JAMES’ PRAGMATIC DEFINITION OF TRUTH

Pragmatism is undoubtedly one of the most important, and at the same time most diverse, currents in modern philosophy, and James’ views are usually taken as its representative formulation, along with the position espoused by Charles Sanders Peirce. The pragmatic idea of truth plays a special role in this regard. The issue was elaborated on by James with exceptional scrupulousness, as he considered it fundamental to gaining a proper understanding of pragmatism.

The American philosopher presents his views on truth against the background of its classical definition. There are two main reasons for this. First, that understanding of truth, as *adaequatio rei et intellectus*, is so widely affirmed that all definitions of it are usually categorized as either classical or non-classical. Second, it was the proponents of the classical definition who launched a frontal attack on the pragmatic perspective on truth. James was convinced that—leaving aside the actual differences between the two positions—the vehemence of that attack, and the accompanying argumentation, testified to a fundamental misunderstanding of the pragmatic definition of it. This is not to say that the author of *Pragmatism* succeeded—even in the course of numerous debates with his adversaries and the formulation of additional explanations and exemplifications—in unequivocally formulating his own position. On the contrary, the undoubted vivacity and vividness of the style of James’ works unfortunately did not go hand-in-hand with any corresponding precision in respect of the arguments presented in them (Stepnik 2010, 155).

The American philosopher was inclined to approve of the classical definition of truth as a correspondence of mental ideas with cognized elements of reality. This is obvious with regard to sensory cognition: it involves creating a faithful copy of the perceived object (James 1912b, 199). What is problematic, however, is the relation of fit supposedly obtaining between an idea and a more complex object. James defined it as follows:

To “agree” in the widest sense with a reality, can only mean to be guided either straight up to it or into its surroundings, or to be put into such working touch with it as to handle either it or something connected with it better than if we disagreed. Better either intellectually or practically! (James 1912b, 212–13)

The touchstone for identifying compatibility between ideas and the world is thus utility. If a person arrives at the truth, they can then make use of it in their actions, in transforming reality in one way or another. Accurate cognition of a given element or aspect of the latter, in the sense of grasping the rules governing the object under study, allows for effective action: “Our obligation to seek truth is part of our general obligation to do what pays. The payments true ideas bring are the sole why of our duty to follow them” (James 1912b, 230).

The rightness of ideas is therefore closely related to their practical consequences: “True ideas are those that we can assimilate, validate, corroborate and verify” (James 1912b, 201). The search for truth always begins with a person’s experience, in which they encounter a certain problem. Then, they adopt a cognitive, theoretical attitude, which means distancing themselves from specific conditions. The individual then tries to conceptualize the problem and find hypothetical solutions to it. Their verification necessarily involves a return to the realm of experience: “Truths emerge from facts; but they dip forward into facts again” (James 1912b, 225). If some proposed idea allows us to face the initial situation more effectively, then we ascribe the value of being true to that idea. Confrontation with the facts is an unavoidable test for the compatibility of *rei et intellectus* “under penalty of endless inconsistency and frustration.”

At this point, it is worth noting that James’ idea of truth is, in terms of its nature, a piece of epistemic theorizing. This means that it focuses on the issue of recognizing ideas as true, while leaving aside the possible metaphysical and logical issues involved (Stępnik 2010, 155–60). Failure to take this perspective into account has led in the past to numerous misguided charges against the pragmatist definition of truth. For just one example of this, we may point to James’ epistolary dispute with the proponent of the classical definition,

John Edward Russell. Among other things, they were engaged in considering the history of the discovery of Neptune. After observing certain perturbations in the motion of Uranus, Urbain Le Verrier, the French astronomer, predicted the existence of a previously unknown planet. Russell claimed that the thesis of Neptune's existence would have become true, on the pragmatist account, only after Le Verrier's calculations had been empirically verified—which sounds absurd. James retorted that it was the very pragmatist understanding of the truth of Le Verrier's thesis that made the subsequent discovery of the planet possible (James and Russell 1907, 290–94).

In the context of this sort of epistemic treatment of truth, the various theses then developed by the American philosopher become understandable. He argued that however human cognition strives for absolute truth, for the most part it deals with relative truths: "The truth of an idea is not a stagnant property inherent in it. Truth happens to an idea" (James 1912b, 201). We recognize an idea as true just as long as it leads to actions that bring us satisfactory results. However, new facts that occur in our experience can, as it were, falsify the idea and make us renew our search for truth—that is, for an idea more in line with reality.

James notes that truth relatively infrequently imposes itself on the cognizing subject. Instead, an individual is usually forced to make a decision in the face of various possible views of reality:

We must find a theory that will work; and that means something extremely difficult; for our theory must mediate between all previous truths and certain new experiences. (James 1912b, 216)

When faced with a choice between competing ideas, we lean toward the one that best suits our "personal reasons," while sometimes "poor scientific taste" is the only decisive factor.

### 3. PRAGMATISM AS THE SOURCE OF POST-TRUTH?

Outlining the understanding of truth according to James' conception in the way that we have just done allows us to analyze the thesis of Juruś quoted earlier, about the influence of pragmatism on the spread of post-truth, in more detail. Before doing so, it is necessary to reiterate two lines of argumentation signaled by the Polish philosopher. The first is that one not so much discovers the truth about the world, but rather actively creates it. If, as James believes, the *sine qua non* for establishing the truth of an idea is to assimilate it and verify it in action, then truth loses its objective foundation. It is the individual subject who both formulates theses and

recognizes them as consistent with reality once they prove useful. The subjective basis of truth-oriented cognition results in relativism, which to some extent validates post-truth.

Juruś' second argument accentuates the notion of the primacy of action over thought that is contained in pragmatism. This is an attitude alien to classical philosophy, which valued truth as an autotelic value, acquired for its own sake. For James, speculative reflection, when completely detached from human experience, was worthless. Such a view posed the threat of abandoning the intellectual path to truth in favor of exclusively seeking effective activity:

The contemporary world is a world of activists, people who are active, not contemplating. The life of a philosopher compared with the life of a traveller, leader or celebrity is considered boring and uninteresting. (Juruś 2021, 51)

Within James' conception of truth, one can undoubtedly also identify many other elements that—if properly interpreted—lend support to the idea of a relationship between pragmatism and post-truth. Thus, if the truth of ideas is always relative in nature, and closely linked to the current evaluation of both past and present experiences, this means that we have no reliable criterion of truth. This, in turn, leaves room for potential manipulation and deception of the kind that is so typical of post-truth.

Finally, we arrive at an argument that is perhaps the most compelling, and that touches on an issue highly characteristic of James' psychological and philosophical views. He repeatedly emphasized the importance of individual differences (in intelligence, personality, temperament and ability) for the choices an individual makes. This applies not only—as a matter of course—to practical life decisions, which relate to the shape of one's professional and family sphere or the profile of one's interests, but also to worldviews and scientific preferences. James closely correlated the two types of mental make-up he distinguished with philosophical views. The tender-minded are rationalistic, idealistic and religious, and opt for the existence of free will and optimism, whereas the tough-minded are empiricist, materialistic, irreligious, fatalistic and pessimistic (James 1912b, 12).

Since "personal reasons" have such a significant impact on the beliefs one holds, the importance of indisputable facts or infallible rules of entailment diminishes within the framework of the individual's quest for truth. Knowledge then loses its quality of objectivity and even—by weakening the criteria for the truthfulness of a theory—of intersubjectivity. It should be noted that the American philosopher was fully aware of the possible

consequences of his position. He repeatedly referred to the evidentialist statements of William Kingdon Clifford, who warned against taking any views on trust:

It is desecrated when given to unproved and unquestioned statements, for the solace and private pleasure of the believer; . . . it is wrong always, everywhere, and for any one, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence. (Clifford 1877, 292–95)

In defiance of such evidentialism, James advocated the validity of the “will to believe.” An individual has the right to choose the beliefs to which they are inclined by subjective, non-rational factors: “Our passional nature not only lawfully may, but must, decide an option between propositions” (James 1919, 11). Thus, it seems justifiable to make assertions solely on the basis of one’s own point of view, and acting in accordance with them can be accused of neither deception nor even ill will.

To recapitulate: it is not difficult to discern some connections between James’ pragmatism thus presented and the contemporary phenomenon of post-truth. If, indeed, we accentuate the ideas of subjectivism, activism, relativity of truth, personal reasons, or the will to believe as they figure in the views of the American philosopher—and they are undoubtedly present there—it can even be argued that the post-truth era embodies his epistemological position. However, this conclusion is fundamentally incorrect. The goal of the next stage of the present line of argument will therefore be to establish the falsity of the thesis of the influence of James’ pragmatism on the development of post-truth, and of the argumentation supporting that thesis.

#### 4. DEFENDING WILLIAM JAMES’ PRAGMATISM

As we shall shortly see, a more in-depth analysis of the views of the American philosopher takes us to a point from where the hypothesis of their connections with post-truth becomes questionable, to say the least. Our subsequent reasoning in this regard will be limited to just two arguments: the first relates to radical empiricism, meaning a version of pragmatism that James formulated (largely under the influence of criticism of his position) toward the end of his life, while the second relates to the specific issue of the will to believe.

James repeatedly referred to the debate between rationalism and empiricism, which was one of the most important debates in the modern history of philosophy. One may get the impression that by calling his view “radical

empiricism” he was unequivocally taking sides in that epistemological dispute. However, the view of the American pragmatist definitely goes beyond the simple opposition between rationalism and empiricism. James certainly emphasized the inseparability of cognition and experience:

To be radical, an empiricism must neither admit into its constructions any element that is not directly experienced, nor exclude from them any element that is directly experienced (James 1912a, 42).

At the same time, he understood experience in a much broader sense than a typical empiricist would, and the radical nature of empiricism in this case had nothing in common with its extreme form as represented by George Berkeley or David Hume. According to James (1912a, 42–61), what we cognize based on sources is not limited to the sphere of sensory perception alone, but also includes all kinds of relations, as well as the very subject of cognition. It is worth adding that the American philosopher studied religious experiences comprehensively, and took a serious interest in paranormal phenomena.

For James, though, the absolute priority was the search for truth and its experimental verification: “we must go on experiencing and thinking over our experience, for only thus can our opinions grow more true” (James 1919, 14). Reliable scientific research should absolutely be based on the results of objective methods, thus making it possible to formulate theorems and laws that increasingly better describe and explain reality, as well as predicting future events. In doing so, the standard qualities of a scientist are patience and caution:

We can throw the chance of *gaining truth* away, and at any rate save ourselves from any chance of *believing falsehood*, by not making up our minds at all till objective evidence has come. In scientific questions, this is almost always the case. (James 1919, 20)

Moreover, the inevitable subjectivity of human cognition does not result in any arbitrariness in determining what truth is:

We saw that, for James, the psychological factors that participate in the truth-processes (e.g., satisfaction) are not sufficient to make an idea true. The fact that truth is made does not mean, for him, that you can make it as you wish. (Araujo 2022, 485)



If we revisit typical examples of post-truth—the approval of public figures’ deceptions, the avoidance of discomfort resulting from truth, and appealing to emotions in defiance of facts—it is difficult to find any connection between post-truth and the idea of radical empiricism. James’ view supports truth and rejects all its opposites, no less than the systems created by Plato or Immanuel Kant.

Refuting the charge concerning the right to accept beliefs despite a lack of adequate justification for them also requires a more detailed description of the American philosopher’s position. He believed that the scientific ideal of a cautious and patient attitude towards cognized reality is not universal. This is because the ideal in question does not work in situations that involve significant existential choices—when one’s decision has the character of a genuine option, and is therefore “forced, living, and momentous” (James 1919, 3). The coerciveness of such a choice lies in the fact that the individual cannot refrain from making it, since the absence of any action (toward which the intellectual insolubility of the problem inclines one) is also a choice, while often being the worst possible one of all.

James illustrated the issue of the genuine option with two examples. The first involved moral issues:

Science can tell us what exists; but to compare the *worths*, both of what exists and of what does not exist, we must consult not science, but what Pascal calls our heart. . . . The question of having moral beliefs at all or not having them is decided by our will. (James 1919, 22–23)

In doing so, James points to some analogies with Kant’s system, under which moral issues—in view of their non-empirical nature—must be resolved by practical reason: i.e., the will.

The second example concerned religious beliefs. In the title of his famous essay, James defended the permissibility of the will to believe. Religious claims are, in his view, scientifically unverifiable, and so any arguments in that area—for or against the existence of God, for example—are unreliable (again, this position is reminiscent of Kant’s view). However, one’s attitude toward religion is a genuine option: one must make a choice between theism and atheism. James argued, as Blaise Pascal had done as early as the 17<sup>th</sup> century, that a skeptical/agnostic stance does not mean merely suspending one’s judgment on religious matters. From a pragmatic point of view, the skeptic is making a choice—a choice of atheism—because they are pursuing actions much like those of non-believers:

He is actively playing his stake as much as the believer is; he is backing the field against the religious hypothesis, just as the believer is backing the religious hypothesis against the field. (James 1919, 26)

Again, it is difficult to connect James' formulation of the right to make distinct moral or religious decisions with post-truth. The fact that the American philosopher approved of making subjective choices in the absence of reliable knowledge of the object of choice has nothing in common with deliberate misrepresentation in a situation of having such knowledge. Genuine option-based resolutions have nothing to do with the deception so characteristic of post-truth.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

The foregoing investigation allows us to present an unambiguous conclusion: the pragmatism of James cannot be considered a view that has contributed to the modern development of post-truth. Since the position of the American philosopher, and especially his idea of truth, is considered to be perhaps the most representative of the entire pragmatist current, the more general thesis of Juruś regarding the influence of pragmatism on the spread of post-truth should also therefore be deemed to have been falsified.

Does that mean that pragmatism has nothing in common with post-truth? Well, not necessarily. Modern pragmatism is a current broad enough to accommodate views quite far removed from the original ideas of Peirce or James. Arguably, within this wide-ranging spectrum of approaches certain tendencies can be identified that have inspired the modern "producers" of post-truth. An example of this is furnished by Joshua Forstenzer's analysis of Richard Rorty's views as they relate to this issue. It turns out that the American neo-pragmatist's idea of liberal ironism has—contrary to its author's intentions—contributed to the legitimization of current post-truth politics (Forstenzer 2018, 27–28). However, it is worth noting that this influence arose from the postmodernist rather than the pragmatist elements of Rorty's thought. Still, it would certainly be worth exploring the thesis of the lack of influence of pragmatism on the development of post-truth with reference to the views of eminent pragmatists other than James.

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# Kierkegaard's Characterisation of Abraham and Mary as Knights of Faith in *Fear and Trembling*

Some Critical and Exegetical Considerations on the Relation  
between Faith and Reason

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**ABSTRACT** Kierkegaard refers to the figure of the Knight of Faith to sustain a definite picture of the relation between faith and reason, with the aim of arguing that faith cannot be rationally buttressed or justified. In *Fear and Trembling* he identifies Abraham and the Virgin Mary as Knights of Faith. This paper first illustrates the notion of the Knight of Faith, focusing on Abraham, the Knight of Faith *par excellence*. Secondly, it considers two paradoxes that the sacrificial binding of Isaac in *Genesis* may present, one involving an inconsistency between God's command and moral standards, the other a contradiction between God's command and a blessing Abraham was offered. It argues that there is no ground to assert that Abraham would have been aware of the former. Thirdly, it claims that Mary ought to be characterised as a Knight of Faith in light of a paradox involving a blessing she was promised, and certain concrete situations and events. The article refers to historico-exegetical scholarly work to argue that, contrary to what Kierkegaard claims, given the attitude of these two figures when facing these paradoxes, one cannot sustain any picture regarding the relation between faith and reason.

**KEYWORDS** Abraham; Knight of Faith; Mary; paradox; reason

## INTRODUCTION

In *Fear and Trembling* (hereinafter *FT*), Kierkegaard calls Abraham and Mary (the mother of Jesus) Knights of Faith: i.e. individuals who have complete trust in God, even when it seems unreasonable or absurd to do so. The present article first discusses Kierkegaard's notion of the Knight of Faith, focusing on the Knight of Faith *par excellence*, the patriarch Abraham. It then considers two types of paradox that, according to Kierkegaard, the *Akedah* (the sacrificial binding of Isaac in *Genesis*, where Abraham mostly exhibits the attitude and virtues that make him a Knight of Faith) presents. I claim that although Abraham's situation here may contain these two types of paradox—one involving a contradiction between God's command and moral standards, the other an inconsistency between a blessing he was promised and God's request—contrary to what Kierkegaard intimates, there are no grounds to suggest that the patriarch would have been aware of the former one. Finally, it claims that Mary ought to be characterised as a Knight of Faith in light of the fact that, like Abraham, she too faced—and was aware of facing—a paradox involving inconsistency between a favour or blessing she was promised and certain concrete situations and events in her life.

The paper refers to historico-exegetical scholarly work to back up the claims made in the second and third stages of the argument mentioned above. Most importantly, it considers what follows from these claims with regard to the debate about the relation between reason and faith, a debate in which Kierkegaard was highly engaged, his philosophy being firmly rooted in the tradition that holds that articles of faith as well as divine commands and injunctions cannot be rationally buttressed or justified (see Carr 1996, 236–49; Della Torre and Kemp 2022, 193–214).<sup>1</sup>

1. Apart from his engagement with his immediate religious context in nineteenth-century Denmark, Kierkegaard's views should be considered in relation to the centuries-old debate in Western thought and theology about the relation between reason and faith in Christianity, an issue that has been debated since the Church started establishing itself and gaining a foothold amongst educated Roman subjects (see Copleston 1993a, 13–40). Throughout the Middle Ages, the view that reason should be used to buttress, discern, or formulate doctrines and dogmas concerning God's existence, nature and demands generally prevailed. The opposite view, which holds that reason cannot help with establishing the existence of God, or characterise His nature, or help one understand the reasonability of the demands He makes, also had its roots in Late Antiquity. With the Protestant Reformation, this latter approach gained new vigour. For many Reformists, the human being "can have no knowledge of God but what he receives by grace" (MacIntyre 1995, 119).

With regard to God's commands and commandments, this division was characterised by two approaches to the demands He makes: what Brian Stiltner calls a voluntaristic one,

The article does not seek to argue for or against this view of the relation between faith and reason. It neither supports nor denies Kierkegaard's claim that there is a tension between reason and faith. Nor does it delve into the debate as to whether there is (or may be) an existential tension between ethical and religious spheres of existence, as Kierkegaard maintains. In a more modest fashion, what the paper claims is that, contrary to what Kierkegaard and a number of commentators seem to suggest, no argument for any view regarding the relation between faith and reason may be adduced from the attitude of Abraham and Mary to the paradoxes they were aware of facing.<sup>2</sup>

#### KIERKEGAARD'S KNIGHT OF FAITH AND THE DEBATE ABOUT FAITH AND REASON

Kierkegaard holds that Christianity defies vindication in rational terms, rejecting as he does the view that Christianity "could be objectively justified . . . in terms of speculative thought" (Gardiner 1988, 68). While rationality can provide the keys to understanding the material world, this being a world governed by objective laws that reason can unearth, God is the transcendent and absolute "Thou" that cannot be known through reason. If "faith begins . . . thinking leaves off" (*FT*, 44). So, while reason can provide answers (through science) to questions like "Can the atom be split?" that are rational and objective, when it comes to such questions as "Does God exist?" or "Is God benevolent?" or "How can God incarnate into a human?" or "Ought I to obey the Decalogue?" it can provide none. In *Philosophical Fragments* (hereinafter *PF*), Kierkegaard calls attempts to demonstrate that God exists and prove articles of faith like the immortality of the soul "delusional" (see *PF*, 191). In *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments* (hereinafter *CUPPF*), he claims that faith cannot result from scientific reflection, and whoever will look for objective truths in a text like the Bible will not be approaching this text with the passion typical of faith, no matter how much effort one invests in that research. Even if, at some point, some truths concerning faith are arrived at in the context of the latter, this will produce inertia, and not push one to be faithfully related to God (see *CUPPF*, 21–22). Acceptance of God as proclaimed by Christianity

and a rationalist one. Where the former is concerned, "an act commanded by God is right because God wills and commands it" (Stiltnier 1993, 22); there would be "no criteria by which [humans] can judge what God says" (MacIntyre 1995, 119). According to the rationalist approach, on the other hand, God would only command acts where these are "in themselves right . . . and God recognises this to be so" (Stiltnier 1993, 22).

2. The term "aware" is being included purposefully here. The reasons for this inclusion will be evident later in the paper.

cannot be the conclusion of reasoned argument: "Philosophy cannot and should not give faith" (*FT*, 25). Faith requires a leap.

Through this leap one not only trusts and believes that there is a God, and upholds articles of faith that cannot be rationally buttressed, but starts to consider oneself related to Him via the creature-creator relation. One will accept and abide by God's commands and commandments, even if these cannot be objectively buttressed or attested to and in fact involve absurd or paradoxical consequences (see *PF*, 37–48).

In relation to this picture of faith, Kierkegaard refers to the figure of the Knight of Faith. The latter embraces God even if there are no objective rational grounds to buttress His existence and the life choices that follow from accepting Him. He or she also has faith in God, and in Him alone, and because of this can act in ways that appear to others as unreasonable, irrational and absurd.

The foremost example of the Knight of Faith is the patriarch Abraham. In *Fear and Trembling* Mary, the mother of Jesus, is also identified as a Knight of Faith. This is due to an analogy Kierkegaard draws between her story and aspects of Abraham's narrative in *Genesis*.

The Knight of Faith may find himself in paradoxical situations that would not have arisen had she or he not made his or her commitment to God (see Gardiner 1988, 75). Such situations will generate anxiety, but will also provide the circumstances under which the Knight exhibits virtues like faith and courage.

In logic and semantics, a paradox normally involves an "unacceptable conclusion supported by a plausible argument from apparently acceptable premises" (Read 1995, 150). Classic examples would be the Liar's paradox and Russell's paradox concerning sets and classes. These rely on the meaning and ontological commitments of sentences like "All Cretans are liars," and on the properties of sets and numbers. However, the paradoxes that concern faith are not the paradoxes one finds in logic textbooks.

For Kierkegaard, a paradox involves "a tension between apparent (or real) opposites that cannot be resolved without the negation of both" (Storm n.d.). In *Fear and Trembling*, Kierkegaard implicitly alludes to two types of paradox present in the story where Abraham is requested by God to sacrifice His son. These are ones that he does not distinguish systematically in that work, but which it is important to differentiate.

The first is the paradox set out in the second part of *Fear and Trembling* (*FT*, 45–100), wherein the Knight of Faith is commanded by God to act in ways that are inconsistent with moral parameters pertaining to what is right or wrong—with moral laws and duties, like the commandment not



to murder another human being or the duty to love one's son above everything (see *FT*, 45–46). The paper calls this type of paradox “fideo-moral.”

The other type of paradox puts the Knight of Faith in situations that need not require one to act in ways that are inconsistent with moral standards but involve behaviour, conduct, or life situations that are, or appear to be, counterintuitive, incongruous, or contradictory relative to some end or objective that the person in question is set or supposed to achieve. This type of paradox will be called a “logico-practical” one. Kierkegaard implicitly alludes to this second type primarily in the first part of *Fear and Trembling* (see *FT*, 1–44). How the two paradoxes differ may be illustrated through the following examples.<sup>3</sup>

Someone giving away his money to become richer would be doing something paradoxical in the sense of this second understanding of “paradox”—i.e. in logico-practical terms. The act in question seems to be contrary to the aim that the person wants to achieve. Yet, this situation does not involve inconsistency with accepted moral norms. On the other hand, a situation where God authorises a hungry supplicant to steal a loaf would not be counterintuitive in terms of what the person requires or seeks. (The loaf will alleviate her hunger.) Such a situation, however, may be considered inconsistent with accepted moral laws and injunctions: namely the moral law that commands one not to steal. This scenario would be an example of a fideo-moral paradox.

The *Akedah*—the sacrificial binding of Isaac—seems to involve both types of paradox.<sup>4</sup> Yet, unlike what Kierkegaard himself suggests, this paper claims that one can assert with certainty that Abraham would have been aware only of one paradox. Any conclusion regarding the relation between faith and reason that one can draw from the patriarch's attitude when commanded by God to sacrifice his son would therefore have to be considered only in relation to the paradox of which one can assert with certainty that he would have been aware. The reasons why one can assert with certainty that Abraham would have been aware of only one paradox are illustrated in the next two sections.

3. Kierkegaard refers to other types of paradox throughout his work. In *The Book on Adler* (hereinafter *BOA*) he refers to the paradox whereby the eternal (God) becomes finite in Christ through incarnation (*BOA*, 161–163). In *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments* he refers to another paradox that involves situations where, objectively, there might be evidence both for and against God, but where, subjectively, one would have faith in God and believe oneself to be related to the Deity (see Herbert 1961, 42–47).

4. I use the word “seems” here as no consensus exists amongst commentators and scholars regarding whether the story actually involves both paradoxes.

# ABRAHAM, AND A FIDEO-MORAL PARADOX HE MAY NOT HAVE RECOGNISED

Kierkegaard considers Abraham to be the Knight of Faith *par excellence*. The focus here is on the story where the patriarch is called to sacrifice his son. This section illustrates Kierkegaard's claim that the *Akedah* involves a fideo-moral paradox, and that Abraham's attitude to this paradox is indicative of the attitude of the Knight of Faith towards faith, reason, ethics and the relation between these. The section that follows then claims that though Abraham's story might involve the two previously mentioned types of paradox, unlike what Kierkegaard suggests, it is safe to think that Abraham was aware only of the logico-practical one. Thus, it would not make sense to draw any conclusion regarding the relation between reason and faith from Abraham's attitude to the fideo-moral paradox the *Akedah* may involve.

The fideo-moral paradox would arise because the patriarch is required to act in ways that are (seemingly) inconsistent with certain moral rules or laws that many in Kierkegaard's society (and not just there) accepted. Abraham is commanded by God to kill his child, a command that is inconsistent with what many consider to be a moral law prohibiting murder, and with the duty to love one's offspring.<sup>5</sup> Throughout the years, a host of philosophers and theologians have been troubled by the morality of God's demand. The question has repeatedly been asked: how could God command Abraham to kill his child or lie to him, if this was just a tribulation? Various answers have been given.<sup>6</sup>

Kierkegaard claims that the tension between God's command on the one hand and laws condemning murder and the duty to protect one's son on the other indicates an unbridgeable chasm between the ethical and the religious spheres. It indicates that these spheres cannot be reconciled in a manner that would make the demands of one sphere consistent with

5. A father "should love his son" (FT, 61), and as regards the son he "has the highest and most sacred obligation" (FT, 20).

6. In *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* (hereinafter *RLRA*), Kant holds that the demand may appear "to have come from God Himself . . . [but] it is at least possible that . . . a mistake [by Abraham in interpreting God's will] has prevailed" (*RLRA*, 178). Aquinas, on the other hand, in *Summa Theologiae* (hereinafter *ST*), claims that God is not actually commanding Abraham to commit murder, i.e. to unduly take away a human life. This is because after the original Fall, and before the death and resurrection of Christ, all humans are guilty of rebellion against God and therefore under sentence of death. In the case of Isaac, God would merely have been instructing Abraham to carry out the sentence (*ST*, I-II, q. 100 a. 8). More recently, Jacques Derrida has downplayed the conflict between morality and God's command, holding that Abraham's story is fundamentally about whether Abraham is capable of keeping a secret (i.e. the command to sacrifice Isaac). This should be considered in light of another secret, the I-thou relation between the two (Derrida 1999, 172).

those of the other.<sup>7</sup> In terms of the moral law not to kill and the duty to protect his offspring, Abraham should not have harmed his child. Yet, God calls him to do otherwise. This tension between God's command and moral commands and duties "does not permit of mediation" (*FT*, 56–57).<sup>8</sup> An act of murder condemned by universal moral laws commanding one not to kill is transformed "into a holy act . . . pleasing to God" (*FT*, 53). If the ethical is conceived in terms of laws and duties that stem from reason and/or are derivable from rational considerations, then the tension between moral laws and God's commands will be indicative of a chasm between reason and faith.

Kierkegaard's presentation and discussion of this fideo-moral paradox have been of major interest to many contemporary philosophers and theologians seeking to comment on *Fear and Trembling*.<sup>9</sup> The present paper, however, is not interested in the issue of whether the *Akedah* does involve such a paradox or not. Assuming that it does, what concerns us here is whether there are grounds to assert that Abraham was aware of it, and hence whether persons of faith may draw any conclusions regarding the relationship between faith and reason and/or ethics from the patriarch's attitude to the paradox.

In *Fear and Trembling*, Kierkegaard shows Abraham as being sensitive to the tension between moral laws that command one not to kill an innocent human being and to love one's offspring on the one hand, and what God orders him to do on the other.<sup>10</sup> He claims that Abraham chooses to obey God's command "in defiance of the deeply grounded moral principles that

7. It is not possible to "bring Abraham's act into relation with the universal [i.e. ethical laws] . . . to discover any connection . . . between what Abraham did and the universal . . . except the fact that he transgressed it" (*FT*, 50).

8. "The ethical expression for what Abraham did, is that he would murder Isaac; the religious expression is, that he would sacrifice Isaac, but precisely in this contradiction . . . the dread" (*FT*, 22). "If faith does not make it a holy act to be willing to murder one's son then let the condemnation be pronounced upon Abraham as on any other man" (*FT*, 22).

9. See, for instance, (Sagi, 1992, 83–103; Vos 2014, 200–208; Cahyawicaksana and Fery 2022, 23–53).

10. This is evident in passages like "Abraham . . . payed no heed to . . . ethical determinations" (*FT*, 71), and "[he] knew that ethically the father should love his son" (*FT*, 61) and that "to the son the father has the highest and most sacred obligation" (*FT*, 20). For Kierkegaard, Abraham's awareness of the inconsistency between God's command and universal ethical laws emerges even from the fact that the patriarch informs neither his wife, nor his son, nor his servants about the real intent of the journey to Mount Moriah (Genesis 22:1–10). One reason Abraham cannot explain to others why he is willing to kill his son is because no explanation—not even one that refers to God's command or order—can be reconciled with accepted universal ethical laws and duties (see Hannay 1982, 71).

forbid the killing of an innocent person” (Gardiner 1988, 56) as well as the duties a father has towards his son. Abraham “knows . . . that it is glorious to belong to the universal” (*FT*, 66), i.e. to act according to what moral laws and duties require. Yet in the *Akedah* he “renounces the universal” (*FT*, 65) to show his faith in and absolute obedience to God (see *FT*, 50). Abraham does not “place himself in an absolute relation to the universal [i.e., universal moral laws, but] in an absolute relation to the absolute” [i.e. God] (*FT*, 82). This is taken by Kierkegaard to indicate that to the person of faith, God’s commands should take precedence over universal moral laws and duties, even if these are derived from or based upon reason. The person of faith must:

- i. Do what God commands even if this is irrational.
- ii. Do what God commands even if it contravenes moral laws and duties.

Moral laws and duties can be relativised, and superseded or suspended in light of something higher,<sup>11</sup> what Kierkegaard calls the “teleological suspension of the ethical” (i.e. “overstepping the ethical [in view of] a higher telos outside it” [*FT*, 50]). Had Abraham tried to reconcile God’s commands with ethical laws or with reason, he would never have got “to the point of sacrificing Isaac” (*FT*, 47). He would have been tempted to disobey God, “the ethical [thus becoming] the temptation” (*FT*, 102). The paradox indicates the existential tension between ethical and religious ways of life.

That Abraham was aware of a conflict between God’s demands on the one hand and moral laws and duties on the other is something that even some contemporary commentators of Kierkegaard accept.<sup>12</sup> Some take the patriarch’s predicament to be paradigmatic of what it is to have faith: a “person can only be said to have faith when he/she experiences anxiety born from the dilemma of the inner struggle . . . either obeying God’s commands . . . or carrying universal moral commands” (Cahyawicaksana and Fery 2022, 67). Abraham “opts for God over Isaac, faith over ethics, unreason over reason” (Mooney 1986, 23).

11. The “ethical . . . is reduced to a relative position in contrast with the absolute relation to God” (*FT*, 61).

12. Sagi, for instance, claims that Abraham experienced “the conflict between religion and morality and expressed the anxiety entailed by this” (Sagi 1992, 89). He consciously “suspended the ethical and followed the divine command . . . rather than heeding the moral obligation which would have commanded him to refrain from the act” (Sagi 1992, 83). Cahyawicaksana and Fery also write about Abraham “struggl[ing] with faith against rational-ethical demands that he must also fulfil” (Cahyawicaksana and Fery 2022, 54).

The section that follows refers to historical and exegetical considerations to argue that, contrary to what Kierkegaard claims, there are no grounds to indicate that Abraham would have been aware of the fideo-moral paradox his situation may have involved. If the claim is correct, one cannot refer to the patriarch's attitude to the fideo-moral paradox to sustain any picture of the relationship between faith on the one hand and reason and/or ethics on the other—to sustain the contention that faith involves “an act of will rather than of reason” (Vos 2014, 197–98). It also refers to the second paradox that Abraham's story involves: a logico-practical paradox that the patriarch would certainly have recognised. Later in the paper, the claim is made that the relevant similarity between Abraham's and Mary's stories lies in the manner in which they face this second type of paradox.

#### KIERKEGAARD'S UNWARRANTED CONJECTURE AND THE LOGICO-PRACTICAL PARADOX

The previous sections have referred to what Kierkegaard calls the Knight of Faith—a person who accepts God through faith alone and determines their existence and life choices in light of this decision. In determinate circumstances, the Knight's relation to God may induce him to act in ways that appear unreasonable, irrational and absurd. In *Fear and Trembling*, Kierkegaard refers to two paradoxes that may be present in the *Akedah*: a logico-practical and a fideo-moral one.

This section argues that even if the *Akedah* does involve a fideo-moral paradox,<sup>13</sup> contrary to what Kierkegaard suggests, there are no grounds to assert that Abraham would have recognised this paradox. If the patriarch's story is considered in historico-exegetical terms, there are no grounds to buttress the suggestion that Abraham perceived an inconsistency between some moral law or duty on the one hand and God's demand to sacrifice Isaac on the other. No conclusion regarding the relationship between faith and ethics and/or reason may thus be drawn from Abraham's supposed attitude to the fideo-moral paradox that the *Akedah* may involve.

In *Genesis*, God is displeased with Cain killing Abel (Genesis 4:8–17). Also, before the book introduces Abraham's story, God does command humans not to kill other humans (Genesis 9:6). Yet this does not imply that the author of *Genesis* or the society in which Abraham lived would have understood the “ethical [as] the universal [that] applies to everyone . . . [at] every instant” (FT, 45), as Kierkegaard suggests. *Prima facie* this description of the ethical as the

13. As stated earlier, the present paper will not delve into the issue of whether or not the *Akedah* actually presents us with a fideo-moral paradox.

universal applying to everyone at every instant sounds Kantian,<sup>14</sup> though Kierkegaard actually understood it in Hegelian terms. Here, “the ethical” is “virtually synonymous with the ‘universal’” (Roberts 2007, 25), and refers to “normative claims immanent to the social sphere” (Roberts 2007, 25).<sup>15</sup> The “universal” would be synonymous with “duty or the moral law” (Wood 1990, 170). This understanding of the ethical “derives our ethical duties from social relationships and institutions” (Wood 1990, 158). Morality would involve “the individual moral subject . . . judging actions by a standard of the good, whose content is [also] drawn from . . . the agent’s well-being [as well as] the well-being of others” (Wood 1990, 154). This contrasts with Kantian universal laws, since these do not refer to the social sphere and are not derived from social relationships and institutions, but are the “verdict of practical reason” (Wiggins 2006, 93). Kantian moral laws determine the “good on grounds valid for every rational being” (Wiggins 2006, 93) at any time, without admitting exceptions or compromises, and do not take into consideration any consequences for the community that follow from obeying such laws.

Because they are immanent to the social sphere, moral laws understood along Hegelian lines may be trumped if the results are beneficial to the social sphere they regulate (something that is anathema to a Kantian understanding of morality). Thus, if the good of the social sphere requires that in particular circumstances one does not act according to what is commanded by a moral law, or abide by one’s duties, this is allowable given that it is the same social sphere that grounds the duties or moral laws in question. With regard to human sacrifices, these were frequently conceived along such lines, as offerings to obtain relief in a situation of extreme danger, to get out of a desperate situation, or as a form of reparation or to appease some god (Berthelot 2007, 152).<sup>16</sup> Kierkegaard himself refers to examples of Agamemnon, Jephthah and Brutus, where the command not to murder a human being and/or to safeguard one’s progeny is superseded for the good of the community (see *FT*, 47–50).<sup>17</sup> Here, the moral law forbidding

14. As do other entries where it is claimed that “ethics [deals with] pure categories [and] does not appeal to experience” (*FT*, 71).

15. Roberts claims that “Kierkegaard uses a Hegelian term . . . [meaning] ‘communal norms’” (Roberts 2007, 274) in ways “that ignore . . . historically specific contexts” (Roberts 2007, 274) and implies that these rules command “universally” (Roberts 2007, 274)—i.e. are addressed to anyone in any context.

16. Thanks to an anonymous referee who highlighted this aspect.

17. In the case of Jephthah, he had to sacrifice his daughter because otherwise “victory [would] be taken from the nation” (*FT*, 49). In the case of Brutus, he had to kill his offspring for the sake of the State and for Rome (*FT*, 49).

the killing of innocent human beings and the duty to protect one's progeny are suspended "for the sake of saving a people . . . [or] to maintain the idea of the state" (*FT*, 50). Otherwise "the whole nation is hindered" (*FT*, 48). The good of the community would supersede "the ethical obligation towards [one's] son" (*FT*, 48). The tragic hero who suspends these moral laws and duties would "still [be] in the ethical" (*FT*, 49). The willingness to sacrifice one's progeny for such a good is indeed "a higher expression of the ethical" (*FT*, 50), having as it does "support in the universal" (*FT*, 68),<sup>18</sup> and approaches "a higher expression of duty" (*FT*, 68).

In the case of Abraham, however, the conflict between the command not to murder and the duty to love one's son on the one hand, and God's command on the other, would not be mediated by the good of the community (see *FT*, 100). After all, God does not call on the patriarch to sacrifice his son for the sake of the latter.

Someone who upholds the conception of the ethical as the universal—whether in Kantian or Hegelian terms—will understand the *Akedah* as involving a fideo-moral paradox. (In the former case, this is because violating a moral law is not contemplated for any reason whatsoever, whilst in the latter instance it is because, as Kierkegaard suggests, the universal commands not to kill and to love one's offspring are not being violated to obtain some good for, or avert some evil to, the community).

Yet there are no grounds, Biblical or historical, to assert that Abraham did himself perceive the ethical as "the universal." If he (and his community) had upheld certain other characterisations of the ethical—for instance, some proto-Ockhamist conception of it—he would have perceived no fideo-moral paradox. Here an act is made right by the very "fact that God wills . . . it to be done" (Copleston 1993b, 104). Any moral laws would be "wholly contingent" (Copleston 1993b, 104) not only in relation to their "existence but [also

18. Edward Mooney refers to two ways in which, within Hegelian philosophy, a duty can be understood as "universal." This explains why Jephthah, Brutus and Agamemnon would still be in the "ethical." According to Mooney, "A duty can be taken to be universal if it is binding on all persons as persons, or on all persons within a given role or position or relationship. If I am a servant or debtor, I have certain obligations binding on me that derive from my role or relationship and would bind anyone else in that role or relationship. They may of course be overridden by other claims or obligations, but they nevertheless have some hold on my conduct, and they have that hold regardless of desires or interests I may have to the contrary. When Agamemnon must kill his child we have tragedy rather than senseless murder because duties attached to his role as parent and to his status as a person are counterbalanced by duties attached to his role as king, head of state, preserver of the common good . . . But both sorts of duties or claims are, in Kierkegaard's terminology, in the realm of the universal" (Mooney 1986, 27).

to their] essence and character . . . [depending only] on the divine creative . . . will" (Copleston 1993b, 104). God could at any time establish a different moral order, or even "order what he had previously actively forbidden" (Copleston 1993b, 104). Given such an understanding of the ethical, if God ordered someone to murder their own son this would not just fall within the ethical but actually become meritorious. If Abraham did somehow conceive of the ethical along these lines, God's demand, while probably sounding strange (in the sense that God does not command Abraham to sacrifice his son as a reparation, appeasement or for some other reason in relation to which human sacrifices were frequently offered in many societies),<sup>19</sup> would not have been perceived as inconsistent with moral laws or the ethical. He would not have been aware of any fideo-moral paradox.

The claim being made here is not that Abraham understood the ethical along these proto-Ockhamist lines. Rather, it is that the historical/exegetical grounds for believing that he understood moral laws along these lines are on a par with those for asserting that he understood them in Hegelian terms—as in both cases there are none.

Since Abraham's attitude towards the fideo-moral paradox that the *Akedah* may present us with depends on him perceiving the ethical as the universal, and since there are no grounds to assert that he did conceive of the ethical along these lines (and not along lines that may make God's demand to sacrifice Isaac consistent with the ethical, as would be the case if he espoused some, proto-Ockhamist theory), one cannot claim that Abraham perceived the fideo-moral paradox that the *Akedah* may have involved and reacted to it in a determinate way. In short, one cannot draw any implications regarding the relation between faith on the one hand and reason and/or ethics on the other by referring to his attitude to such a paradox.

Abraham, though, would have been aware of another paradox connected to the sacrifice of Isaac, this being the practico-logical paradox involved both in the *Akedah* and in Abraham's entire story in *Genesis*. Kierkegaard alludes to this paradox in the first part of *Fear and Trembling*. It is this second paradox that would have caused him anxiety and distress, and it is in relation to this paradox that he would have exhibited the virtues that make him a Knight of Faith.

In *Genesis*, God calls the patriarch and asks him to leave his native land. Abraham sets aside personal comfort to follow this call. In return, God promises him a blessing. Later on, the two strike a pact: Abraham will

19. In the case of Abraham, his action would "not generate concrete results" (FT, 53). Abraham's sacrifice "did not serve the state" (FT, 67).



receive the blessing if he obeys God. As Kierkegaard notes, the blessing in question is not an other-worldly reward (*FT*, 27). God does not promise Abraham an exalted afterlife. Abraham's promise is "for this life" (*FT*, 16), and is to be obtained through a son that he will beget: "I will make you a great nation and I will bless you. I will make your name great" (Genesis 12:2 NAB). Later on, God also promises him and his descendants a land (Genesis 1–9; 13:14–18). Abraham fulfils his part of the pact with God and leaves the land of Ur (*FT*, 12). Yet his wife remains barren. The years are passing and he has no progeny. As "time passed, it became unreasonable [for] Abraham [to] believe" (*FT*, 13) he would be blessed in the manner promised by God. Abraham, however, held fast in faith and expectation. He kept believing "the preposterous" (*FT*, 16)—namely, that he would receive the blessing even if it now seemed unlikely.

At one point, following his wife Sarah's advice, Abraham adopts a pragmatic approach and has a child with his slave Hagar (Genesis 16:1–4). God, however, indicates to Abraham that it is not through this son that the pact will be fulfilled, but through another child to be born to Sarah, something that seems unlikely given her age (Genesis: 17:19). God's promise seems to be finally fulfilled in Abraham's old age (see *FT*, 13). After Isaac is born, the most obvious ending to the story would be to have Abraham growing "old in the land . . . [having a multitudinous] generation, [and] find[ing] favour in Isaac" (*FT*, 16). God, however, asks him to sacrifice this child (Genesis 22:2). In being ordered to sacrifice his son, Abraham is commanded by God to do something that is inconsistent with God's own pledge, with the pact they struck, and with the blessing this supposedly involves (Genesis: 12:1–4; 17:2–9). He was being "deprived of every hope for the future" (*FT*, 17). Yah seems to have tricked him. The demand appears to be the culmination of a life of torments (see *FT*, 13).

In the *Akedah*, then, Abraham faces a logico-practical paradox. On the one hand, he is promised a blessing through a son if he obeys God. On the other, obeying God seems to imply renouncing the son through which the blessing in question will materialise. Abraham would have been aware of this paradox because, contrary to the fideo-moral one discussed above, awareness of this logico-practical paradox does not require a specific conception of ethics or moral norms. It only requires a basic notion of consistency. He would have known that by fulfilling God's demand he would be renouncing the possibility of the blessing ever materializing. By disobeying he would be renouncing the commitment to obey God that he had endorsed, thus dissolving the pact. This logico-practical paradox would have caused anxiety and distress.

It is in Abraham's attitude to this logico-practical paradox that he exemplifies "what [it] is to believe" (Vos 2014, 198). It is in relation to this logico-practical paradox that he displays virtues like faith<sup>20</sup> and courage.<sup>21</sup> Abraham continues to trust and obey God, and keeps his part of the pact, even though God seems to "make sport" (*FT*, 14) of him. His steadfast attitude and commitment are those of a Knight of Faith. Abraham believes the absurd: namely, that God will still keep his promise despite the command to sacrifice Isaac (*FT*, 38). Here, the absurd "is not identified with the improbable, the unexpected, the unforeseen" (*FT*, 38), but with acting in a determinate way, even if "all human reckoning [would have] long since ceased to function" (*FT*, 27). It involves having "reason and reflection saying: you cannot act" (Kierkegaard 2002, 268) in a determinate way, and yet having to act in that way nonetheless (see Kierkegaard 2002, 268). Reason would tell Abraham that he cannot obey God and sacrifice Isaac if the blessing is to materialize. Yet Abraham still obeys God and trusts Him. He still trusts that God will in "the next instant recall the requirement" (*FT*, 27) and "not require Isaac of him" (*FT*, 27).

An implication of the fact that Abraham faced a logico-practical paradox and would have been aware of doing so is that his willingness to sacrifice Isaac can only be taken to indicate that the person of faith trusts God even when circumstances seem antithetical to the blessing they have been promised. In such circumstances, the person of faith keeps trusting that God's promises will come good, even if it seems absurd for the person to retain their faith.

Abraham's attitude to the logico-practical paradox is not indicative of any specific view regarding the relation between reason and/or ethics on the one hand and religious faith on the other. It cannot be adduced to indicate that there is a chasm between faith and reason, or that the demands

20. According to Kierkegaard, faith involves a double movement. The first such movement is resignation: "giving up what one loves the most" (Vos 2014, 211). Abraham thus resigns himself to losing Isaac. This movement may be common to the Knight of Faith and to people who have no faith. An atheist may resign herself to losing her son and come to accept this in a stoic fashion. Kierkegaard notes that there is no absurdity in this resignation (*FT*, 37–38). The Knight of Faith, however, "makes another movement" (*FT*, 37), believing that what they are resigned to losing will be restored back (Vos 2014, 211). This is the second movement. Abraham is ready to renounce Isaac, but keeps believing that God's blessing will come good and that Isaac will be restored "by virtue of the absurd" (*FT*, 29), because "with God all things are possible" (*FT*, 37; see also Adams 1990, 386). Abraham will make both movements (*FT*, 102).

21. Courage involves the "ability to be still and silent even in a situation of anxiety and distress, fear and trembling, and [be open to] a Word that may change everything" (Carlisle 2016, 285). This "is intimately linked to the idea . . . that faith is a mode of receptivity and responsiveness" (Carlisle 2016, 287).

of faith and moral laws and duties could be fundamentally incompatible with each other—that there is an existential tension between ethical and religious ways of life.

It is in relation to a similar logico-practical paradox that Mary resembles Abraham, and she too deserves the title of Knight of Faith. This will be discussed in what follows.

#### MARY AS A KNIGHT OF FAITH

To recapitulate, in *Fear and Trembling* Kierkegaard interprets Abraham's story as involving both a fideo-moral and a logico-practical paradox. The paper argues that even if the *Akedah* involves the two types of paradox, if the story is considered in historico-exegetical terms one can only assert that Abraham would have been aware of the second paradox. That Abraham was also aware of the fideo-moral paradox that God's command to kill his son presents us with is something that Kierkegaard conjectures in the absence of any biblical or historico-exegetical backing. No conclusion regarding the relation between reason and/or ethics on the one hand, and religious faith on the other, can be drawn from Abraham's attitude.

In *Fear and Trembling*, Kierkegaard claims that Mary, the mother of Jesus, is another Knight of Faith. The rest of the section argues that he is correct in identifying Mary as such a figure, though one of the reasons Kierkegaard brings forward to sustain this claim is off the mark. There is, however, a point of analogy between Abraham's and Mary's stories as they relate to the logico-practical paradox—one that Kierkegaard seems to have been aware of, but which he did not develop—that qualifies her as a Knight of Faith. However, even that in virtue of which Mary qualifies as a Knight of Faith does not allow one to draw any conclusions regarding the proper relation between faith and reason.

Kierkegaard rightly holds that in their lives both Abraham and Mary are not "exempted from distress and torment and paradox, [indeed] they become great through these" (*FT*, 56). They are not exempted from anxiety. Yet when it comes to substantiating the similarities between the two figures, he compares Mary to Abraham primarily because of what he claims is their silent isolation.<sup>22</sup> Mary's silence is due to the fact that no one is able to understand the mission assigned to her by God (see *FT*, 65).

22. Kierkegaard claims that Abraham is silent on his way to Mount Moriah due to the impossibility of revealing to others the command he is abiding by. The reasons for this are twofold. First, there is the impossibility of others understanding Abraham's intent, since they would not understand how a command by God could be inconsistent with moral norms and

Clare Carlisle rightly notes that Kierkegaard “imaginatively reconstruct[s] Mary’s] inner life in a way that goes beyond the biblical narrative” (Carlisle 2016, 282). For instance, he discusses the episode in Luke 1 where the Archangel Gabriel communicates to Mary the news that she has found favour with God and will beget a son. For Kierkegaard, this was a mission “only [she] and no one [else] could understand” (*FT*, 55), and this was for Mary a source of anxiety and torment (see *FT*, 56).

Mary’s being anxious because only she can understand her mission is something conjectured by Kierkegaard. In relation to Gabriel’s visit, Luke refers to the fact that she was “deeply troubled” (Luke 1:29 NAB) by the Archangel’s manner of salutation. She may have become “a model disciple who consents to what is not yet fully understood” (Gaventa 1999, 55), but this does not imply that she was unable to communicate the news the Archangel had given her, or that she was anxious because of her mission. Her bride Joseph seems to have been aware of her calling, and believed her story. As Jorge Pixley and Leonardo Boff note, Mary’s reaction to the news brought by Gabriel “is not complicated by any consideration of the scandal [her pregnancy] . . . will cause” (Pixley and Boff 1989, 85). Indeed, Joseph seems to be more worried than Mary and wants to protect her, being concerned about possible sanctions their community may have meted out in light of Jewish laws concerning sexual intercourse, pregnancy and engagement (see Matthew 1:19–21). Furthermore, as noted by Raquel Lettsome, in no way do Mary’s pregnancy and mission “alienate her from society” (Lettsome 2021, 17) or cause her to detach herself from her community and kin. After Jesus’s birth is announced, she connects with her relatives and other members of her family (see Lettsome 2021, 17), and goes to visit and assist Elizabeth and Zechariah (Luke 1:39–40).

Mary, however, may rightly be characterised as a Knight of Faith in light of other similarities between her narrative and the story of the patriarch Abraham. Specifically, her story resembles Abraham’s narrative in relation to a logico-practical paradox pertaining to a favour and blessing she was promised, and to events and happenings that involve elements and features that seem to be antithetical to this blessing and favour. Her character as a Knight, and the virtues pertinent to such a figure, emerge in light of the anxiety that would have been caused at different points in her life by this paradox. Kierkegaard seems to be aware of this paradox when he asks “When [was] woman . . . so mortified as Mary? And is it not true in this

laws, including the duties a father has towards his son (*FT*, 51). Secondly, others would not have believed Abraham if he had told them that this was all a trial (*FT*, 21).

instance also that one whom God blesses He curses in the same breath?" (FT, 55) Yet he fails to develop this aspect of her narrative.

The Archangel Gabriel told Mary that she had "found favour with God" (Luke 1:30 NAB), had received a blessing, and was "highly favoured among women" (FT, 55). Her blessing and favour, then, are gender-specific.<sup>23</sup> The Church, especially where its Eastern and its Catholic branches are concerned, has generally characterised Mary as being blessed and finding favour with God in terms linked to original and inherited sin (she being freed from the latter—hence her resistance to sin and temptation), to Jesus's redemptive mission, and to sexual morality (where virginity is considered an inherently superior moral or spiritual state). Aspects of the Marian narrative, such as Jesus' virginal birth, were emphasised and supplemented with doctrines that defined Mary as the *Theotokos* (fifth-century Ephesus) and declared her perpetual virginity (the Seventh Lateran Council), her Immaculate Conception (1854), and her Assumption into Heaven (1950).

Regardless of the truth of these doctrines and dogmas, Mary herself would not have understood her finding favour with God along these lines. She would have understood these in ways that would have made sense to a woman belonging to first-century Judaism in Palestine. (Even if she carried within her what, in *The Book on Adler*, Kierkegaard calls "the paradox of the eternal becoming finite," there are no grounds to indicate that she would have been aware of this paradox, especially on receiving the news of her blessing by the Archangel.) Within first-century Judaism, a woman's role was to rear and educate children, not through the study of the Torah (this role was assigned to males—namely, to fathers and to the Synagogue) but by instilling in them Jewish values and preserving certain customs like the keeping of the Sabbath.<sup>24</sup> A woman would find favour with God and be blessed if her offspring imbued the Jewish values she would have sought to instil in them. She would also find favour with God through a son, were he to later find a secure status in society. This would have enabled him to have a stable family and afford his mother as comfortable an old age as possible. In the case of Jesus, then, the Archangel distinctly specified that "he will be called Son of the Most-High . . . [and] God will give him the throne of David his father" (Luke 1:32 NAB). This Davidic

23. This is confirmed by the greeting she receives from her relative Elizabeth, who calls her: "Blest . . . amongst women" (Luke 1:42 NAB).

24. This represented a regression compared to previous centuries, when women could participate in the economy and labour (see Exodus 35:25; Ruth 2:7; Proverbs 31:1; Samuel 8:13), as well as in the Temple in most mansions—apart from priestly ones (Psalms 68:25; 1 Samuel 1:12; 2 Samuel 6:19–22). By the first century women had been relegated to the domestic realm.

kingdom was thought by Jews to be worldly yet eternal, characterised by justice, and headed by a legitimate ruler. (Unlike the house of Herod and the Hasmoneans, Jesus was related to King David, a fact emphasised by both Mark and Luke.)

Given the standards pertaining to what made a woman blessed in first-century Judaism—the standards in terms of which Mary would have interpreted her finding favour with God and her being blessed—if one considers the gospel episodes that involve her, she seems to be anything but a woman who found favour with God through her son.<sup>25</sup> Jesus's birth made her liable to punishment, occurred in shabby and dangerous circumstances, and led to political exile (Luke 2:1–9; 34–35). On returning to Judea, a holy man at the Temple predicts that a sword will pierce her soul (Luke 2:35), and Jesus becomes a cause for concern when he gets lost at the Temple, one year before his Bar Mitzvah (Luke 2:42–47). His reaction to Mary's expression of concern ("Son, why have you done this to us? Your see that your father and I have been searching for you in sorrow" Luke 2:48 NAB) does not reveal much empathy on his part.

Though Luke claims that in the years after the episode Jesus is obedient to his parents (Luke 2:51), the incidents from his adult life that follow do not lend credence to the idea of a woman who found favour with God; rather, they are a further cause of anxiety and distress (see Matthew 27:5–6). The episode of the wedding feast in Canaan, for instance—a feast at which Jesus arrives late and where he performs his first miracle—shows Mary and Jesus on very different wavelengths as regards the "Kairos," meaning the "right time" for him to show God's glory through his deeds (John 7:2–9).

25. In the Marian stories in the Gospels, we do not see an implicit or an explicit challenge to ideas about women prevalent in first-century Judaism, as might be the case with certain other gospel stories that concern women. Here, stereotypical roles are implicitly challenged and subverted. Thus, even though Rabbinical wisdom would warn that whoever "dialogues at length with a woman hurts himself, is careless in the study of the Law, and ends up in the Gehenna" (*Pirkei Avot* 1:5), the longest dialogue in the Gospels involves Jesus and a Samaritan woman (John 4:1–29). In other passages, women are described as the first witnesses to the resurrection (Mark 16:1–10) at a time when women's testimony was not accepted (see Hertzberg 2008, 116). Luke's gospel also tells of women who provided Jesus and the apostles with a living (Luke 8:1–3). Jesus also praises a woman who does not engage in house chores and mansions (the proper role of women according to Jewish society of the time) but listens to him as an ardent disciple (Luke 10:38–42). No such challenges to female roles and stereotypes are to be found in gospel passages involving Mary: there are no challenges to commonly accepted ideas regarding what made a woman blessed or favoured by God. The only passage where Mary's narrative seems subversive is the prayer she sings on meeting Elizabeth (the Magnificat). Here, however, the subversion in question is not gender-related, but concerns the "ānāwīm . . . [the] 'poor of the Lord' [that] include . . . widows, orphans, and foreigners" (Lettsome 2021, 13).

Jesus neither formed a stable family nor found a secure place in society. With the beginning of his public ministry—a ministry in which Mary was generally uninvolved—he undertook the life of a vagrant and was frequently at odds with established authorities and members of his own community. This will likely have caused Mary anxiety and concern given the kind of Jewish upbringing, “respectful of the temple as the centre of Israel’s . . . religious faith” (Pixley and Boff 1989, 86), that she probably gave him.<sup>26</sup>

No wonder that she supported some members of her family who wanted “to take charge of him [thinking that] ‘He is out of his mind’” (Mark 3:21 NAB).<sup>27</sup> Jesus’s reaction to their attempts is not one that would have made a Jewish mother feel blessed or favoured by God, seemingly distancing himself from her and his family “in favour of his followers” (Kilpatrick 2001, 17)<sup>28</sup> and claiming that “Whoever does the will of God is brother and sister and mother to me” (Mark 3:34 NAB). In the final episodes of Jesus’ life, then, the son through which Mary was supposed to be blessed and to find favour with God not only fails to guarantee her a tranquil old age or re-establish David’s kingdom in this world, but is abandoned by his disciples, tried, condemned to death, tortured and killed.

Just as with the patriarch Abraham, Mary in her life faces a logico-practical paradox. Events and happenings occur that seem antithetical to the promise made to her by Gabriel. Yet Mary exhibits virtues like faith and courage—virtues that make her a Knight of Faith. Even though, as Kierkegaard writes in his *Journal* (*The Journal of Kierkegaard 1834–1854; A Selection*, hereinafter *TJK*), a “sword . . . pierced [Mary’s] . . . soul . . . [she still] dared . . . to believe . . . [that she is] the chosen . . . [that] she . . . found grace in the sight of God” (*TJK* 233). Even when she fails to comprehend, Mary holds fast in her faith right up to the crucifixion, seemingly consumed by tragedy but subsequently reconciled with the community Jesus has founded and, on Pentecost, present alongside the nascent Church after her son has risen from the dead (Acts 1:12–26). She thus shows herself worthy of the title Knight of Faith.<sup>29</sup>

26. The journey to the temple narrated in Luke 2 is indicative of the respect that Mary and Joseph had for this institution.

27. See also Matthew 12:46 and Luke 8:19.

28. See also Matthew 12:48–50; Mark 3:33–35; Luke 21.

29. Carlisle points to other similarities between Mary and Abraham: both “receive news from God that they will bear a son, against the natural course of things” (Carlisle 2016, 281), and both “receive a son directly from God, contrary to expectations” (Carlisle 2016, 279). Moreover, like Abraham, Mary faces the loss of the child through which she was blessed; like

As in the case of Abraham, Mary's attitude to the logico-practical paradox she faces suggests that the person of faith keeps on trusting that God's promises will come good, despite events and happenings that appear antithetical to the blessing and/or promise in question. Her attitude to this paradox, however, does not indicate that there is an unbridgeable chasm between reason and faith. One cannot draw any conclusion here regarding the proper relation between faith and reason.

#### CONCLUSION

In *Fear and Trembling*, Kierkegaard claims that Abraham is the paradigmatic Knight of Faith in light of how he faces up to the paradox his narrative involves. The present paper has argued that though Abraham's story might involve both types of paradox—both a fideo-moral and a logico-practical one—contrary to what Kierkegaard suggests, the patriarch would have been aware only of the second.

It has also been argued here that Kierkegaard is correct in identifying Mary as a Knight of Faith. Yet he mischaracterises the paradox that is involved in her narrative. Mary's paradoxical situation does not involve the impossibility of communicating to others her mission. Rather, she faces a logico-practical paradox similar to the one confronting Abraham. Her paradox concerns the fact that she is supposed to have found favour with God and be blessed through her son Jesus, yet the events involving Jesus seem antithetical to how she herself would have understood these developments.

My thesis has not been that Kierkegaard is wrong in claiming that there is an opposition between faith and human reason, or an existential tension between ethical and religious spheres of existence. This is a weighty question that goes beyond the remit of this article. Rather it is that no conclusions can be drawn about the relation between religious belief and reason from the attitude of these two figures to the logico-practical paradox they faced and were aware of facing. One can only conclude that the person of faith will keep on believing that God's blessings and promises will come good.

Jesus promised humans life aplenty. Yet death, injustice and suffering seem to prevail. The person of faith should believe that, despite all appearances to the contrary, death, suffering and injustice will not have the final say.

the great patriarch, she bears "witness to the loss of the divine gift as well as to its subsequent restoration" (Carlisle 2016, 279).



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# The Hermeneutics of Holy Time

## On the Ethical Role of Skepticism in Religion

*Antoni Torzewski*

**ABSTRACT** The aim of this paper is to elaborate the hermeneutics of holy time. The main thesis to be developed is that through an awareness of finitude the dialectic of holy and non-holy time leads to skepticism, which in turn serves to reduce religious violence. The holiness of a given time is therefore constituted on ethical rather than ontological grounds. The research aim here is not to describe some factual state of affairs connected with the notion of holy time, but rather to put forward in normative terms a certain interpretation of the latter that seeks to present it as a means for reducing violence and to reconcile it with the postmetaphysical account of (weak) religion.

**KEYWORDS** holy time; philosophy of religion; postmetaphysics; skepticism; religion; violence

## INTRODUCTION

The notion of time, as it relates to religion, can be viewed from multiple perspectives. It is interesting to consider it in connection with God's omniscience and human freedom, or to reflect on the existential meaning of the eternity–worldliness duality; however, in the context of religion, time can also be perceived in purely religious terms—as holy time. Holiness is reserved exclusively for the sphere of religion, and gives ordinary things a deeper, more profound meaning: e.g., objects like a chalice acquire a whole new meaning when declared holy, because of their history or their purpose. The same applies to holy places, such as a church, mountain, or cemetery, to holy people like the Pope, to holy deeds such as sacrifice, to holy texts like the Bible or the Quran, and to holy times such as Ramadan, Passover, or Easter. Holy time as such, not reduced to any specific exemplification, is thus of great philosophical importance.

The main aim of this text is to answer the question of how we can understand or interpret the meaning of holy time in the contemporary world, and in the light of the postmetaphysical account of religion<sup>1</sup>—an account which underlines the violence of the latter, which it takes to be primarily connected with its claim to absolute truth.<sup>2</sup> In other words, what sort of understanding of such times as Easter, Passover, Ramadan, etc., will count as both existentially and philosophically productive and interesting? An interpretation already exists, which is ontological in character: it claims that holy time is holy because God is somehow more present in it (Ziemiński

1. I understand postmetaphysical philosophy as a contemporary philosophical current which draws consequences from metaphysical thinking, asserts the end of metanarratives, appreciates pluralism and moderate skepticism, and adopts an ethical and antitotalitarian attitude. Postmetaphysics is similar but not identical to postmodernism. I would recognize, amongst others, Marquard (2002; 2007), Blumenberg (1979; 1981), Rorty (1991; 1998) and Lyotard (1984; 1989) as postmetaphysical philosophers. In regard to religion, postmetaphysical philosophy tries to interpret this cultural phenomenon differently from the existing understanding—as non-violent, non-absolute, open, hospitable, weak, loving, as well as tolerant, and not as closed, exclusive, violent, absolute, strong and final. Attempts to develop this postmetaphysical account of religion have been undertaken to varying extents by, amongst others, Vattimo (1999; 2002), Kearney (2011), Caputo (2001; 2006), Žižek (2001) and Sloterdijk (2009).

2. The question of religious violence is very complex. I would argue that in essence, there is no such thing as religious violence *per se* and the violence connected with religion is in fact grounded in metaphysical thinking, which oscillates around an absolute and unitary truth. However, I would need a separate paper to be able to clarify and justify such a view. That is why, in this text, I understand violence broadly as an imposition of will (of an individual, or an institution, or even of a cultural and societal system of thinking) onto a person. Religious violence, in this sense, would be an imposition of the will of a religion (in most cases declared by the Church) onto particular individuals or whole societies.

2020, 58).<sup>3</sup> In contrast to this, I shall propose an ethical interpretation that focuses on the opportunity to deprive religion (and the believer) of any potential justification for religious violence.

Of course, one can raise the question of historical or factual inaccuracy, for there is a strong connection between holy time and bloody rituals performed for the deity, such as human and animal sacrifices, or mutilation of the human flesh. Even in a softer sense, holy time, such as Sunday for Christians, can involve a kind of violence consisting of forcing children to participate in the Holy Mass. However, the research aim of this article is not to describe some factual state of affairs connected with the notion of holy time, but rather to put forward in normative terms a certain interpretation of it—one that seeks to present it as a means for reducing violence and reconcile it with the postmetaphysical account of (weak) religion. In other words, to state the fact that holy time is connected to violence is the same as to state that religion as such is connected to violence. This presents the philosopher with a pair of alternatives: on the one hand, they can abandon religion altogether (if they want to abandon violence), or on the other (if they want to preserve religion), they can try to propose a different understanding of it, to reinterpret it in a way that breaks its connection to violence, and to present it as essentially non-violent (as, for example, Vattimo tries to do) (Vattimo 1999; 2002).<sup>4</sup> In the case of the text presented here, the goal is similar: to try to determine whether there is a possibility of not abandoning holy time as an element of violent religion, while nevertheless pointing to its postmetaphysical meaning as favoring non-violence.

The reasoning central to this article (namely, that the holiness of a certain time should be thought of as based on ethics, not ontology) is grounded in the belief that a human being participating in holy time, while “touching infinity,” gains a certain distance from their everyday life and then, through the dialectic of holy and non-holy time (i.e. experiencing both

3. Ziemiński claims that the time in which God is absent is the opposite of holy time. Therefore, the holiness of time would be constituted by God’s presence, or special presence. In other words, it would be a matter of an ontological difference between those times.

4. It is worth mentioning that from the postmetaphysical perspective adopted here, abandoning religion will not get rid of violence. It is not the case that only, or even primarily, religion is the main source of violence. Rather, it is rooted in a specific, metaphysical kind of thinking. That is why secular systems based on metaphysical thinking are also violent, sometimes inflicting more pain and suffering than religion. Some philosophers, such as Kołakowski, even suggest that religion can potentially be less violent than secular systems, because there are certain “skeptical breaks” included in it, which at the same time are not present in the secular systems. That is why, among other factors, religion—in its weak form—is worth preserving (see Kołakowski 2010, 91).

these timeframes), recognizes their own finitude. This awareness of one's finitude then leads to the arousal of a skeptical attitude, which in turn causes the elimination of religion's violent potential. In other words: placing oneself in the middle—between divine infinity and absolute temporality, and between knowledge and ignorance—renders them skeptical, which in turn refutes the argument for killing in the name of (religious) truth. *Ipso facto*, the presented reflections can be viewed as an attempt to interpret holy time in the light of the postmetaphysical account of religion, in which the ethical aspect of nonviolence plays the main role.

Given what has been said, the main thesis of this paper is that through an awareness of finitude, the dialectic of holy and non-holy time leads to skepticism, which in turn serves to reduce the violent potential of religion. Acknowledging the enormous difficulty, or even impossibility, of defining religion as such (Quinn 2005, 397), let me state that in this text, what I understand as religion is a set of cultural phenomena called "religion," between which there obtains a family resemblance.<sup>5</sup> Establishing the level of resemblance, and thus defining what can or cannot be counted as religion, can be accomplished by evoking an arbitrarily selected prototype of the latter—in this instance Christianity (particularly in its Catholic form).<sup>6</sup> That is why the interpretation of holy time developed here will apply primarily to Christianity, but also (to some extent) to the other two Abrahamic religions—Judaism and Islam. The application of that same interpretation to other religions—be they versions of polytheism, or atheistic religions—would be a task for another, separate article. The ensuing reflections fall into three parts: (1) the hermeneutics of holy time, (2) the dialectic of holy and non-holy time, and (3) the role of skepticism in religion.

### 1. THE HERMENEUTICS OF HOLY TIME

What is holy time? Well, it seems that one can differentiate between two main ways of understanding this notion: a narrow and a broad one. The former would present holy time in specifically religious terms as a particular period (with specified limits) of great religious importance, like Easter in Christianity or Ramadan in Islam. Holy time, on this narrow understanding, is therefore celebrated in a certain manner, lasts for a certain amount of time, and is always connected with past events or, as Eliade says, constitutes a mythical time understood as the eternal present (Eliade 1987, 69). The Romanian

5. Here, I follow some insights of Hick regarding the definition of religion (see Hick 2005, 4).

6. The notion of a prototype in the context of defining religion is explored by, for instance, Quinn (see 2005, 409).

thinker's account of holy (or "sacred," as he calls it) time underlines the mythical deed of gods, or a god who laid the foundation for the future distinguishing of a certain period: e.g., Christ's death on the cross is a source-event for the holy time later named and celebrated as Easter. What is more, holy time is recurrent,<sup>7</sup> often in a yearly scheme (Eliade 1987, 73): that is why Eliade speaks of the eternal present. Time is reduced to the period of one year, and it constantly repeats, as in the Nietzschean concept of eternal return (Eliade 1987, 70). So, the narrow understanding of holy time is closely related both to religion and to a founding event involving, in most cases, gods or a god, and in addition highlights the repetitiveness of the sacred period.

This narrow understanding of holy time can also be presented in relation to the secular. Holy times such as Independence Day, or various anniversaries, are constituted in a way similar to religious ones. The time is specified, lasts one day, is founded on a "mythical" deed from the past, and repeats every year. Hence, there are in fact two variants of the narrow understanding of holy time: the religious and the secular one.

The broad way of grasping the notion of holy time, meanwhile, departs from all these traits, because it presents holy time in a very general manner—along the same lines as any period not necessarily specified, not necessarily founded on a specific event, and not necessarily recurring. On this broad construal, holy time can be a celebration of recovery from an illness or finishing a project, etc. This way of understanding holy time, however, seems to be too inclusive, and not philosophically productive. That is why, in this paper, I will refer to holy time in relation to the first, narrow understanding, pertaining to the religious and non-secular meaning of holy time.<sup>8</sup> Some kind of a provisional definition of holy time could

7. Gadamer (1986, 41) also underlines the recurring character of the festival.

8. It is worth mentioning, however, that a certain question arises concerning holy time in its secular version: namely, what will be the status of non-religious people in the light of the considerations explored here? Is it possible for them to participate, just like religious people, in holy time, only in its secular version? Do they need to do so in order to sustain a morally good society? This is a difficult problem, because if the answer is positive—in the sense of "Yes, they can participate in holy time" and "Yes, they need to do this to preserve a good community"—then it reduces everything to religion of sorts. Being non-religious is not really possible, because regardless of one's convictions one is, up to a point, forced to participate in quasi-religious practices. If the answer is negative, on the other hand, the problem does not disappear, because this means that only a religious society can be a morally good one. This kind of belief, however, seems rightfully long gone. Thus, the problem calls for a different approach. I will not be asking here about the meaning of holy time in secular societies. I believe that there is a significant difference between religious and secular holy time, which mostly pertains to the transcendent character of the former, and the immanent nature of the latter. That is why participation in holy time in its secular form has different consequences

therefore go as follows: *holy time is a determinate period of specified duration, is repetitive, and is founded on a certain source-event which concerns the history of gods, or a god.* It could also be mentioned that certain forms of celebration, for example rituals, relate to holy time. In other words, holy time demands the engagement of a believer.

Putting aside this definition, what is important from this text's standpoint is precisely that believer's perspective on holy time. How would they define it? Holy time needs to be understood on a kind of meta-level, in an abstract sense, as the period when the believer is focused on a religious, infinite, transcendental aspect of life, regardless of the meaning of any particular holy period. For example, it is of no importance to this research that Easter has its own specific meaning as the holy time of Jesus' death and resurrection, or that Passover evokes the exit of Israel from the slavery of Egypt. Both those times direct the believer to the godly aspect of reality, and that is exactly what is important from this text's perspective.<sup>9</sup>

Given these initial remarks, one can already pose the following truly important questions: what is the meaning of holy time as such, and what are the consequences of participating in it? There are many interpretational facets regarding the issue of holy time. Let me explore two of them. The proposed ethical interpretation would start by stating that it seems that holy time presents human beings with a certain opportunity. In the history of philosophy, one encounters a dualistic account of the human as a being suspended between two extremes, which can be referred to in a general manner as its animal (or natural) and divine (or supernatural) sides. The former is related to temporality, finitude, change, ignorance and passion. The latter to eternity, infinity, constancy, knowledge and reason. I do not wish to present a systematic reconstruction of the history of this dualistic conception here, but only to draw attention to the fact that it exists by evoking a few examples of prominent philosophers of different times and places. Pascal, for one, wrote:

For, in fact, what is man in nature? A Nothing in comparison with the Infinite, an All in comparison with the Nothing, a mean between nothing and everything . . . This is our true state; this is what makes us incapable of certain knowledge and of absolute ignorance. (Pascal 1944, 72)

and a different meaning from such participation conceived in religious terms. That is also why I will be focusing here on just the religious dimension of holy time.

9. Holy time conceived in secular terms (such as Independence Day) lacks this godly dimension.



Similarly, Plato, who in the *Symposium* reflected on Eros, understood him as a being in-between, especially “between ignorance and knowledge” (1892, 203). Of course, for Plato, Eros was a representation of a philosopher and therefore a man who is suspended between two extremes.

But how does holy time refer to those remarks? Well, the above-mentioned opportunity that holy time presents the human being with consists in its opening up the possibility of such a dualistic account.<sup>10</sup> In a certain way, without the possibility of participating in holy time, the human being would only be aware of their one, animal-natural side. The other one would be hidden from them. So, holy time introduces that second aspect—the infinite, divine perspective.<sup>11</sup> It enables the human being to escape their animality for a moment, to get in contact with the Holy—to use Otto’s notion (Otto 1936). Participating in holy time can therefore be viewed as, at least partially, fulfilling humans’ desire to transcend themselves, to get closer to the divine using their *sensus divinitatis*. “To reintegrate the sacred time of origin is equivalent to becoming contemporary with the gods, hence to living in their presence—even if their presence is mysterious in the sense that it is not always visible,” writes Eliade (1987, 91). The religious person strives to exist in holy time, to participate in something beyond himself or herself; therefore, it is holy time and not everyday life that constitutes “actual” time for them. Ordinary periods are just a necessary pause between those during which one is participating in the festivity in question.

But what is this participation? When reflecting on the essence of happiness, Aristotle claimed that

whether it be reason or something else that is this element which is thought to be our natural ruler and guide and to take thought of things noble and

10. For Caputo, the opportunity provided by holy time is one for change, *metanoia*—something which can be inscribed into my own considerations here as escaping from one’s animality and gaining distance in relation to one’s life; furthermore, this can then grant one the possibility of a life-change, or could even amount to a significant change itself (see Caputo 2006, 150).

11. Of course, such dualistic anthropology can be questioned, given that there are also other accounts of the human condition: e.g., various monistic, or hierarchical, emanationist theories of being. However, my argument here adopts this dualism in the weak sense, as an interpretation, which is also strongly present in the history of philosophy, and not as a strong ontology. The same applies to the dualism of holy and non-holy time. One could say that there are multiple possibilities for understanding time on religious grounds: e.g., those according to which a believer should develop themselves by climbing the next steps on the ladder of time—from unholy, satanic time, through ordinary, worldly time, to holy time, which is considered eternity and heaven. In this text, however, I simply explore a certain possibility, a certain interpretation present in philosophy that is philosophically interesting, without making any pretense of having grasped the entire richness of the notion of holy time.

divine, whether it be itself also divine or only the most divine element in us, the activity of this in accordance with its proper virtue will be perfect happiness. That this activity is contemplative we have already said. (1999, 173)

Aristotle's reflections reveal some new traits that show contemplation as relying on reason, which is the most divine part of a human being. However, the Greek philosopher also claims that the happiest ones are the gods, so contemplating and therefore being happier is in essence getting closer to the gods, or in some sense a deification of man. In the light of my argument here, one might say that participation in holy time, understood as being in proximity to the infinite, is a form of reason-based contemplation. What is important is the rational character of participating in such time, which enables human beings to distance themselves from their everyday lives. The other crucial thing is that participation in it must be freely chosen by the believer. They cannot be forced into it, just as they cannot do it solely on the basis of some habit they have developed, or their origin, prejudices, education, etc. To truly grasp the meaning of such time one must choose it freely.

It can be noted that there are some simple binary oppositions at work in my reasoning. Pairings such as animality–divinity, reason–passion, infinity–finitude, etc., can be questioned as relics of metaphysical thinking and declared unproductive—much as Rorty argued in many epistemological contexts, when discussing such dichotomies as objectivism–relativism or true–false (Rorty 1979). My point here, however, is to interpret a small, selected piece of the history of philosophy in a way that will show that there were indeed philosophers (such as Plato, Aristotle, or Pascal) who sensed a certain tension or tear in the human condition that is always placed “in the middle,” and to inscribe these reflections within the problem of holy time, which itself shows up as an important factor in the context of this “dualistic” human condition—in that the experience of holy time provides the needed perspective here, introducing as it does a third value between zero and one and so at the same time “breaking” that very dualism. Therefore, it can also be said that what holy time gives to those who participate in it is a kind of relativization—and this will constitute a second facet of the issue of holy time explored in this text.

Contact with the divine makes a human being question the existing world order and their beliefs, in a sense throwing them off balance, because it makes them aware that the familiar is not everything. One's sense of stability is crushed by the experience of the Holy. If there is an infinite reality, of which I just receive a glimpse, what makes me think that my finite

cognition and constitution can grasp anything as it is? So, the strong beliefs one might have are weakened in the face of the divine.<sup>12</sup>

This disintegration of the current structure of beliefs connects the experience of holy time with the anthropological notion of liminality addressed by van Gennep and Turner,<sup>13</sup> who reflected on rituals (in most cases of a religious sort) in primitive societies. Their thesis was that there is a specific kind of ritual, namely the rite of passage, which oscillates around change (van Gennep 1960, 10). This change can refer to an alteration in social status (e.g., from a citizen into a leader), in age (e.g., from a boy into a man), in place (e.g., from outside of the house to the inside), in time (e.g., arrival of the New Year), etc. Holy time, seen from this perspective, can be viewed as a rite of passage between an ordinary time  $t^1$  and an ordinary time  $t^2$ , in which a change occurs. Both van Gennep and Turner claimed that there is a threefold structure to those rituals: first, there is a preliminal phase, in which the person involved is separated from their current situation, such as the society they live in, then a liminal phase—the middle point when the change happens—and finally, a postliminal phase when the person is incorporated back into their situation (van Gennep 1960, 11; Turner 1977, 94).

What is interesting from the perspective I am seeking to introduce here is the meaning of the liminal phase of the ritual in the context of holy time: in particular, the concept of being pulled out from one's everyday life in a rite of passage entails several important points noted by Turner. The liminal situation affects both the person directly involved in the ritual, and the society. The Scottish anthropologist claimed that

liminal entities, such as neophytes in initiation or puberty rites, may be represented as possessing nothing. . . . Their behavior is normally passive or humble . . . It is as though they are being reduced or ground down to a uniform condition to be fashioned anew. (Turner 1977, 95)

12. Of course, there can also be a different interpretation of contact with the divine which highlights not the arousal of skepticism, as in the ethical understanding of holy time proposed here, but rather gaining the sense of certainty provided by God, or even being able to participate partially in divine knowledge. Many people who have claimed they were truly in connection with the infinite being, heard its voice, etc., have acted with great zeal and conviction based on their experience of God and their belief that they know his will. When it comes to people who acted without hesitation and doubt as executors of God's will, we might mention, e.g., Girolamo Savonarola or Joan of Arc. However, this understanding of holy time presupposes its absolutization (as the only significant and meaningful time), which I will examine in the later part of this article.

13. For a synthetic and critical study of liminality and its reception in contemporary anthropology, see Thomassen 2009.

Liminal beings are without properties, they dissolve in a sense into something bigger than themselves, are submissive, uncertain and humble (Turner 1977, 103–5).<sup>14</sup> Contemporary commentators discussing van Gennepe and Turner write, also, that

liminality refers to in-between situations and conditions that are characterized by the dislocation of established structures, the reversal of hierarchies, and uncertainty regarding the continuity of tradition and future outcomes. (Horvath, Thomassen and Wydra 2009, 3)

Where holy time is concerned, it can be said that participating in it is similar to becoming a liminal entity that dissolves into divinity and infinity.<sup>15</sup> So, in fact, holy time is a liminal event that evokes weakening, humility, and finally skepticism—understood as a resignation from strong beliefs.

If one were to significantly broaden the understanding of holy time and treat it metaphorically, in isolation from the religious dimension, one could place it in the context of philosophy or theory as such. The Greek ideal of *theorein* expressed in the view of a philosopher as a disengaged and distanced observer of reality collapses when one takes note of the activeness and engagement, the participation of the human being in holy time that Aristotle associates with our making use of our reason. Diogenes Laertius, while describing the views of Pythagoras, wrote that

he compared life to the Great Games, where some went to compete for the prize and others went with wares to sell, but the best as spectators; for similarly, in life, some grow up with servile natures, greedy for fame and gain, but the philosopher seeks for truth. (Laertius 1925, 327–29)

Identifying the games Laertius speaks of with holy time creates an interesting field for interpretation. For if the philosopher is the one who uses reason, they are no longer a distanced spectator but a participant in holy time. An apparent paradox occurs: in Pythagoras' view, the philosophical distance was obtained through observation without participation, whereas

14. We might also mention that a similar set of feelings is associated with liminality in the arts. One example is photography dealing with liminal architectural spaces, which “are a type of emotional space that conveys a sense of nostalgia, lostness, and uncertainty. They often lack activity and purpose either because they lay unused or because they are spaces of transition—of becoming instead of being” (Koch 2020).

15. This dissolution brings to mind the idea of *henosis* developed by Neoplatonist thinkers, especially Plotinus (2005, 6.9.11).

in the proposed interpretation, a philosopher can gain the needed perspective and distance only through participation. So, the Pythagorean spectator is in fact not distanced (even though they think they are), and the engaged participant gains true distance thanks to the appropriate use of their reason—such distance (and philosophy as such) is possible through participation and not separation. Of course, this distance is not meant to be understood as absolute, but only as partial, because—as many contemporary philosophers, such as Vattimo, Rorty or Marquard show—an absolute shedding of all prejudice is simply not possible (Vattimo 2003, 34; Rorty 1989, 47; Marquard 1989, 116).

An interesting point made by Gadamer may be added to the above reasoning. Considering the temporality of a work of art, the German philosopher uses the metaphor of sacred time—a festival—to describe the experience that accompanies being in contact with art. Setting purely aesthetic reflections aside, he says that

a festival exists only in being celebrated. . . . the being of the spectator is determined by his 'being there present.' Being present does not simply mean being there along with something else that is there at the same time. To be present means to participate. (Gadamer 2004, 121)<sup>16</sup>

Therefore, being present is not understood in the Pythagorean manner as just observing from a distance, but is conceived of as being engaged in an event of holy time. Gadamer's conception is close to Aristotle's, because it shows the participating "nature" of reason-based contemplation.

Theoria is not to be conceived primarily as subjective conduct, as a self-determination of the subject, but in terms of what it is contemplating. Theoria is a true participation

writes Gadamer (2004, 122). Of course, the above-mentioned distance is necessary in order to be a theorist, a philosopher, but it is obtainable only through participation. The German philosopher makes an interesting comment, saying that being present as being engaged is a kind of being outside oneself, based on self-forgetfulness (Gadamer 2004, 122). A person

16. Apart from in *Truth and Method*, Gadamer also reflects on festivals in *The Relevance of the Beautiful*, where he again stresses the participatory character of festivities: "It is characteristic of festive celebration that it is meaningful only for those actually taking part. As such, it represents a unique kind of presence that must be fully appreciated" (Gadamer 1986, 49).

involved in holy time, as I said, dissolves into something bigger, forgets themselves, and gains distance. So theory in general, and philosophy in particular, consists in “transcending” oneself through participation in holy time broadly understood.

To summarize the preceding reflections, it can be said that holy time has various facets, of which I have discussed two. The first one relates to the dualistic account of human nature, the second to the epistemic dimension of the experience of divinity. Thus, holy time in the aforementioned contexts presents itself as a diverse opportunity: it grants humans a perspective on the infinite and makes them aware of their own finitude, helps them escape their animality and discover a “divine element” in themselves, provides them with distance and relativizes existing structures, and, finally, makes them humble and uncertain. Holy time constitutes one pole of the binary scheme I mentioned before. On its own, however, it would just be an extreme, and those opportunities would not be possible. Should we follow Plato, Aristotle and Pascal, then we would need the other extreme as well, if we are to place the human being between them. Holy time, therefore needs to be contrasted with everyday life (ordinary, non-holy time) in order to extract the true meaning hidden in the dialectic of holy and non-holy time.

## 2. THE DIALECTIC OF HOLY AND NON-HOLY TIME

Despite the fact that non-holy time is opposed to holy time, its features do not simply stand in a contrastive relationship to those of the latter. In fact, in a way they are very similar: just as participating in holy time does not itself grant the human being involved in it a sense of distance and perspective—for as long as they are engaged, they, too, are immersed—similarly, non-holy time does not by itself give anyone a separate point of view. Rather, a new quality reveals only in dialectical transitions between holy and non-holy time. However, before addressing this issue a brief characterization of everyday life should be offered.

Non-holy time (just like that to which it stands opposed) demands a kind of participation that rests on one’s dissolving oneself in finite life without being aware of this finitude. Everyday life is characterized by a rush, and an unreflective attitude focused only on things that are near, that seem familiar.<sup>17</sup> The vantage point of a participant in non-holy time is severely

17. I do not wish to claim that without religion (holy time), there is only unreflective, superficial and shallow life. Just like in the context of holy time, in this text I am deploying the notion of non-holy time as a specific attitude one adopts towards life, not as a description

limited and deprived of distance. The sphere of everyday life is dominated by hustle and bustle, constant noise and chatter, or—as Heidegger claimed—by idle talk. This last notion can serve to broaden out the reflections presented here, in that it represents the “apparent” or “provisional” character of non-holy time, as well as its “speed.”<sup>18</sup> What I mean is that in everyday life there is no time for reflection or in-depth considerations: everything seems deprived of foundation and ground. As Heidegger himself writes, “the groundlessness of idle talk is no obstacle to its becoming public; instead it encourages this. Idle talk is the possibility of understanding everything without previously making the thing one’s own” (Heidegger 1962, 213). There is no need to familiarize oneself with anything—that is, to get to know it, to study it. Everything is provisional and superficial in the sphere of ordinary being. That is why Aristotle claimed that philosophical activity “depends on leisure” (Aristotle 1999, 174). Everyday life or political activity—as the Greek philosopher referred to it—makes a human being too busy to reflect and contemplate. For that, he or she needs holy time.

So, what does the aforementioned dialectic of holy and non-holy time consist in? Well, firstly, there is the temporal and a finite aspect of holy time—despite one’s needs and desires, one cannot stay in such time permanently,<sup>19</sup> but has to return to everyday life. Therefore, holy time is just a—shorter or longer, but nevertheless finite—break in-between stretches of ordinary life; it is understood as a special event occurring from time to time, something exciting and not normal or common, whereas non-holy time constitutes the “ground,” the “normality” of the human position, which one can at times escape. Secondly, what matters is the possibility of experiencing both holy and non-holy time, thanks to which human beings gain distance. So, thirdly, the dialectic of holy and non-holy time is about

of any factual state of affairs. From the nonreligious perspective, the religious holy time I described earlier is not a means to escape from such an attitude; rather it is, for example, the aforementioned activities that Gadamer wrote about, as well as scientific activity, meditation, reflection, etc. So, once again, the non-holy time I am writing about here signifies a specific attitude strongly present in contemporary society and not a description of a life without religion. My considerations pertaining to non-holy time are undertaken with the assumption in place that the religious dimension of life is important, and that the holy time connected to it is meaningful.

18. I do not want to delve into the notions of speed and acceleration in the context of everyday life; however, it is worth mentioning that these are becoming more and more popular in contemporary philosophy of culture (see Virilio 2006).

19. Eliade’s category of the archaic man fits very well with the reflections presented here on the subject of the need or desire for holy (sacred) time. Such a figure wants to free themselves from history by participating in holy time, where this then gives them a sense of power (see Barth 2013, 62).

transitions from one time to another, without the possibility of remaining in one of them permanently. This breaks the dualism of holy and non-holy time, introducing a third, “liminal” timeframe. The greatest significance is born by precisely those transitions themselves, rather than by the experience of a single time—whether it be holy or non-holy. Those experiences, however, enable a human being to reflectively confront different perspectives—yet only in transition, as participating in holy time means dissolution into infinity and self-forgetfulness relative to the divine perspective. Participating in non-holy time, on the other hand, means dissolution into the emptiness of everyday hustle and bustle (Gadamer 1986, 42)—self-forgetfulness in the context of the rush of things. Having experienced both times, the human being can also find themselves in-between, and here they will be able to understand their situation as finite.<sup>20</sup>

I have reiterated at several points that people cannot stay in just one of those times, and have to move back and forth between them. Well, this matter needs some clarification. The word “cannot” is, in this context, used in a postulative sense which signifies the ethical need not to limit oneself to just one time. What happens when this postulate is not realized? There are two extremes. The first one relates to an absolutization of holy time, and results in religious hegemony, tyranny, or fanaticism.<sup>21</sup> Paying attention only to holy time, only to divine infinity, leads to the destruction of everyday life and to declaring it to be meaningless and redundant, which in turn causes fundamentalism, zeal and violence.<sup>22</sup> The second extreme has to do with the absolutization of non-holy time, and results in a purely secular, or even antireligious “order” which, when pushed to the limit, can turn into totalitarianism.<sup>23</sup> The appreciation of non-holy time alone constitutes the end of holy time, along with its celebration.<sup>24</sup> The lack of the infinite

20. This is similar to Welsch’s concept of a transversal reason possessing such power as to enable the transition between different kinds of rationality, different incommensurable discourses. Holy time is, from this perspective, a kind of discourse focused on infinity and divinity, and non-holy time a different one, oscillating around finitude and lack of distance (see Welsch 2008).

21. Absolutism is one of the criteria to which Cavanaugh points in his reflections on religious violence (see Cavanaugh 2004, 518).

22. One naïve and popular argument used to justify killing in the name of God is to say that we should kill everyone and leave judgement of them to God, as the innocent will be saved and the guilty condemned.

23. One such antireligious totalitarian system was communism.

24. A highly interesting thesis concerning this issue is put forward by Fishley (2017, 48), who claims that in Charles Taylor’s philosophy “one of modern society’s ‘forgettings’ is how to encounter religious time in a deep and fulfilling manner.” Indeed, it can be asserted that



perspective furnished by the latter can have catastrophic consequences when it comes to our attitude towards our fellow humans, and so on. Therefore, having only one perspective, participating only in one time, and not having access to pluralism, is connected to some dangerous political results in the form of either religious absolutism or secular totalitarianism.<sup>25</sup> The dialectic of holy and non-holy time presents itself in this context as an essential factor of “social health,” so to speak, because it keeps the society in the middle, between two extremes, by making it aware of its finitude.

Let me be clear: I do not wish to say that without religion, violence cannot be overcome. There are purely secular ways of arriving at an awareness of finitude and becoming a skeptic of sorts (which is what I am claiming is essential to reducing violence). However, from the religious perspective (if one is seeking to preserve religion), the dialectic of holy and non-holy time, interpreted as making the believer aware of their finitude, is nevertheless important. On such a view, violence can be reduced both on secular and on religious grounds. So, why should religion not be abandoned entirely—if the goal of reducing violence can be met without it? For one thing, I am not certain that this is its one and only aim. Moreover, there are many positive factors present in religion, such as community formation, giving hope, providing meaning, as well as shaping morality. And what is more, religion exists in the world, and is strongly present in everyday social and cultural practice. Following the rule of conservatives everywhere, one may say that if one does not have a good reason to change something, it should be preserved. Because of the violent potential of (metaphysical) religion, one should intervene and propose a nonviolent interpretation—postmetaphysical, weak religion—but not abandon religion entirely. I do not want to elaborate on this further here, but it is important to mention that there are many reasons why religion should not be ruled out.

The awareness of finitude aroused by the dialectic of holy and non-holy time is crucial to my reasoning, as it connects my reflections on time with skepticism. Absolute knowledge, absolute truth, is unavailable to human beings, given that their condition is a finite one. First principles and stable epistemological foundations are something of a “myth,” because they could

when it comes to true participation in holy time, an “unconscious” process of social forgetting is taking place: either they do not participate in it at all, or they do not understand the meaning of it—one which, on the interpretation I am proposing, is about the reduction of violence.

25. Cavanaugh also draws attention to the question of whether there is any difference between religion and secular systems when it comes to violence—both being based on absolutization (see Cavanaugh 2004, 521; 2016, 18).

be achievable only from an infinite, “godly” perspective.<sup>26</sup> One has to be skeptical, because there is simply not enough time not to be. This is similar to the claims of Marquard, who sees skepticism as a philosophy of finitude (Marquard 1989, 14) and writes that

the absolute—perfect and extraordinary—is beyond the limits of human powers, for humans are finite. In practice they should not follow the motto “everything or nothing”: what is human lies “in between,” truth is half (Marquard 1995, 9).

The finite condition of human beings, and our being aware of it, leads to a skeptical attitude, which does not mean that “nothing is true.” Rather, it is expressed in a Socratic motto that “we know that we do not know anything”—however, with a slight modification, which is that “we know that we do not know anything absolute” or, as Marquard puts it, “skeptics are not those who as a matter of principle know nothing; it is just that they do not know anything that is a matter of principle” (Marquard 1989, 15). In the context of the dialectic of holy and non-holy time it can be said that this movement between times provides the perspective needed to escape from one-sidedness, from what Marquard called “everything or nothing,” and to move towards a middle-ground which expresses itself in a skeptical attitude.

To summarize: on one hand, the human being is submerged in everyday life, and because of their lack of distance they cannot notice their own finitude. On the other hand, through participation in holy time they acquire a sense of distance and begin to perceive everyday life in a skeptical manner, arriving at the quasi-Socratic conclusion that they know that they know nothing absolute. Still, they cannot reside in holy time forever—but also cannot forget about this infinite perspective. This distancing of the human being from their everyday life expresses itself in the skeptical attitude. Therefore, it can be said that the dialectic of holy and non-holy time causes an awareness of finitude, which results in skepticism.

### 3. THE ROLE OF SKEPTICISM IN RELIGION

It seems that a change is beginning to be visible in some parts of contemporary philosophy in regard to the perception of skepticism in the context of religion. From a religious perspective, the main way of understanding

26. As Blumenberg puts it in regard to Plato’s philosophy, the probable is due to humans, certainty to God (2010, 82–83).

skepticism has been to connect it both with agnosticism and with distrust for the Church, where this in turn was viewed as a threat to religion or, at best, as an attempt to weaken it in favor of doubt and secular points of view. Moreover, this perspective treats skepticism as heresy (how can one doubt the truths revealed by God in the holy text?), as a way of moving away from religion, as secularization. In the context of the culture of obedience strongly present in, for instance, the Catholic Church, skepticism is viewed as particularly threatening, because it tears down the existing hierarchy. Skepticism is therefore understood as an anti-religious factor. However, today this is changing, in both the continental and analytical traditions (Wilczewska 2022). Philosophers such as Gianni Vattimo, who define themselves as essentially pro-religious, claim that it is not only good for a believer to be a skeptic, but even that the religious message implies a skeptical attitude.<sup>27</sup> What is important, skepticism is understood here in the abovementioned Marquardian sense: not in extreme terms, but in moderate ones, as a lack of knowledge about knowledge and a relinquishing of pretensions towards knowledge strongly construed as a system of absolutely certain beliefs. Vattimo is not isolated in his views—other philosophers, like Richard Kearney on the one hand and John Schellenberg on the other, do also highlight the positive role of skepticism in religion. Kearney does so from a pro-religious perspective, in the context of the “death of God” and the notion of hospitality (Kearney 2011), while Schellenberg is more ambivalent and says that religion should not be seen as a finished project along with its set of beliefs, but rather (given its cosmic “youth”) as a still ongoing and formative process (Schellenberg 2019). In short, they all assert that the absoluteness of religious beliefs is (for various reasons) not justified, and that it is not a bad thing for religion to do without strong beliefs.

Given the above, skepticism is coming to be understood in a more positive way, especially from a religious perspective. However, the most important trait associated with skepticism in religion expresses itself in skepticism’s ethical vocation—and that is its role in religion: precisely to enhance ethical awareness. This kind of approach is visible particularly in postmetaphysical philosophy.<sup>28</sup> Closely connected to, but not identical with, postmodernism,

27. The process of secularization initiated by the event of *kenosis* and then confirmed by Jesus’ death on the cross is a process of weakening that primarily affects strongly held beliefs; hence, it is an incorporation of doubt into religion, which is considered entirely positive (see Vattimo 2002, 24; 1999, 52).

28. Philosophers such as Vattimo, Rorty, Marquard and Sloterdijk are all advocates of pluralism—where there is only one, there is violence; skepticism, meanwhile, is a means to introduce and preserve pluralism, so it has a profound ethical significance.

it adopts ethics as a “first philosophy” of sorts, and derives other philosophical beliefs from the postulate of nonviolence. Many postmetaphysical philosophers, such as Marquard, Sloterdijk, Vattimo, or Lyotard, argued that the “nature” of strong schemes which explain everything (metanarratives, or monomyths) is that they inflict violence, furnishing a justification for killing in the name of truth (Marquard 1989, 93; Sloterdijk 2009, 96; Vattimo 2002, 114; Lyotard 1992, 16). Sadly, there are all too many historical examples of such a connection. It is visible not only in the religious context of crusades and witch-hunts,<sup>29</sup> but also—or even above all—in the deeds of secular regimes such as that of the communist Soviet Union, or the crimes related to colonialism (Cavanaugh 2016, 13).<sup>30</sup> The believers kill in the name of God, his commandments and other “truths” revealed by him, while comrades and other followers of totalitarian secular orders kill in the name of equality, freedom, safety, etc. These are all beautiful and profound values; however, when absolutized, they are used as a justification for inflicting violence on others who do not share one’s own beliefs.

That is why skepticism is so important. Weakening strongly held beliefs and not letting metanarratives appear ensures that there is no total justification for violence. In the context of religion this means that by introducing skepticism, religion is not being deprived of its existential value for human beings, but only losing its violence.<sup>31</sup> If a believer remains skeptical, and does not absolutize any of their beliefs, then they cannot, for instance, say that God demands that they go forth and kill heretics. In short, skepticism enhances tolerance and reduces violence.<sup>32</sup>

29. For an extensive study of the history of religious violence, see (Armstrong 2000; 2001).

30. Also, democratic systems, which are viewed primarily as a nonviolent reservoir of freedom and dialogue, are distinguished essentially by having no less zeal against their opponents than many totalitarian systems. Democracy is forced—as a universally optimal social system—on communities that have not asked for it; various atrocities have been committed in the name of democracy and virtue, such as the torturing of prisoners by the CIA in numerous prisons across the world (e.g., Guantanamo, Abu Ghraib) (see Delsol 2020; Rejali 2009).

31. Of course, this only means that religion can no longer be used as a justification for violence, and that it loses its violent potential as an absolute and total system. Violence as such can still be present for many other reasons, such as hatred, desire for power or money, etc., but in cases where skepticism has been introduced it cannot be (so to speak) ideologically supported by religion.

32. This kind of argument is often evoked in debates about tolerance. In the Enlightenment, Locke (and then, e.g., Voltaire) repeatedly said that the basis of tolerance is the impossibility of our ever knowing which of the ways proposed by different religions can lead to salvation. In other words, we do not know the absolute truth, so we have to be at least somewhat skeptical, and this leads to tolerance (see Locke 1796, 29). This thread of skepticism is also explored by Vattimo, who claims that secularization is itself the fulfilment of the Christian

As I said before, skepticism in religion is introduced through an awareness of finitude, which is a result of the dialectic of holy and non-holy time. The absence of one or other of these two temporal dimensions could engender an absolutization of one “way of life”—be it purely secular or purely religious—and this could in turn lead to violence. One cannot become a religious skeptic without having had an opportunity to gain the necessary distance, which becomes possible if and when one “goes out” from one of the mentioned timeframes. In other words, given the interpretation proposed and developed here, it seems impossible to be a religious skeptic without constantly going back and forth between holy and non-holy time. Skepticism happens in transitions. On the other hand, when one looks at skepticism in isolation from religion, one can observe purely secular means for gaining distance and becoming a skeptic, such as the perspective of deep time explored by Schellenberg (Schellenberg 2019, 19). My thesis, then, is not that in order to reduce violence, religion (and holy time) is necessary, but only that where religion serves as a basis for other things, the believer should move between holy and non-holy time, understanding their condition as finite and thus becoming skeptical. That just means that religion can abandon its connection to violence—not that it is the only medium for introducing non-violence into society. Thus, a person who inflicts violence on religious grounds, an absolutistic believer, is not really a “true” believer, for they do not understand the meaning of participating in holy time on one hand and non-holy time on the other. They lack distance and perspective. They are either trapped exclusively in holy time, or they have never truly participated in the latter. If they had, they would have become aware of their own finitude, and therefore become skeptical. So, to truly participate in holy time, according to the ethical interpretation being proposed, is to understand its significance as a postulate of nonviolence. Only skeptically inclined believers will grasp that. What is important is for them to make use of the encounter with infinity and arrive at the conclusion that given their own finitude, they cannot treat their own beliefs as final. That is why they cannot force other people to agree with them and share their beliefs, or kill them. Skeptical believers are, in a way, similar to Rorty’s liberal ironists, who are aware of both their own contingency and that of their dictionaries (Rorty 1989, 61).<sup>33</sup>

message understood as Christ’s commandment of love, in that secularization in the end leads to skepticism and deprives religion of its metaphysical elements, which are not essential to it but are related to violence (see Vattimo 1999; 2002).

33. In spite of some readers of Rorty, I do not treat his works as antireligious. Of course, he contradicts the given form of religion, but—and this is visible clearly in the book he wrote with Vattimo—at the same time paves a way for a new, postmetaphysical understanding of it

## SUMMARY

In the context of religion, the notion of time can be addressed in the form of a hermeneutics of holy time. The ethical interpretation I have sought to develop in this paper presents holy time as an opportunity to gain a different point of view related to the experience of infinity, to escape human animality, and to dissolve in the divine. Participation in holy time, captured as a liminal event, relativizes the structure that is already in place, and provides human beings with a distance from their lives. However, engagement solely in holy time constitutes just one extreme, and human beings are—as was mentioned—in the middle. That is why the true meaning of holy time is eventually revealed via the contrast with non-holy time, as a dialectical movement.

Non-holy time presents itself as a time of rush, dissolution in finitude, and lack of distance. However, it is not something one should reject. What can be seen when contrasting those two time-frames is a certain dialectic. Through the participation in both holy and non-holy time, humans can reflect on themselves with the distance they need to have, and this reflection happens in the transition between holy and non-holy time. And what do these considerations on the part of human beings engender? They produce an awareness of finitude: the conviction that they are finite, and that because of this they cannot be certain of their own beliefs. In short, it makes them skeptical.

What is important in this context is the ethical role of skepticism in religion.<sup>34</sup> Relating this to postmetaphysical thought, I have claimed here that religious violence is caused by a belief in the absoluteness of religious truths: if one is sure that God is ordering one to kill the infidels, and that a reward awaits one for doing so, then one will kill them. So, the principal way to reduce the violent potential of religion is to weaken the beliefs it propagates, and this can be done by introducing skepticism into religion itself.

(see Rorty and Vattimo 2005). So, when Rorty describes religion as a conversation-stopper, he refers to the absolutist, metaphysical religion, which is certain about its beliefs, but the notion of the conversation-stopper really fits any metanarrative system—be it religious or secular—which is not capable of doubting its own beliefs and therefore is not capable of a true dialogue. That is why a skeptical kind of religion, a postmetaphysical one, cannot be regarded as a conversation-stopper. Moreover, Rorty does not seem to oppose it (see Rorty 1999).

34. I should stress that despite highlighting the ethical importance of skepticism in religion, and the ethical dimension of religion more generally, this is not a continuation of the Kantian project of equating religion with morality (see Kant 1998). There is not enough space in this paper to elaborate on this, but I would claim that apart from ethics there are other important aspects of religion, such as ritual, prayer, sets of beliefs, etc.—albeit interpreted in a postmetaphysical, weak sense.

The thesis I set out in the introduction to this paper—that the dialectic of holy and non-holy time leads via an awareness of finitude to skepticism, which in turn reduces religious violence—seems justified in the light of the considerations presented here. I also claimed there that the holiness of a particular time is a matter of ethics, not ontology. It now seems clear what significance this holds for us: the proposed understanding of holy time leads to non-violence, and that is why such time is truly holy—in that it contributes to the reduction of suffering, and not because God has a special kind of presence in it.

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## DISCUSSIONS

# The Arches and the Spandrels

## A Response to Kenneth W. Kemp (2)

*Michał Chaberek*

In his book *The Edge of Evolution*, Michael Behe draws on a metaphor of arches and spandrels. The arches are what hold a cathedral together, and spandrels are the “fillings” that may carry beautiful ornaments; however, they have no say in whether a building stands or collapses (Behe 2007, 171–203). Behe explains that it is similar to life—some minor and non-substantial elements of living organisms can be explained by neo-Darwinism, but the complex biochemical systems, which are essential for the survivability of any living organism—cannot. Thus, neo-Darwinism may explain the spandrels but not the arches of life. I think Behe’s metaphor can be taken more broadly and applied to the context of our debate. Here, I will understand it as a mental attitude by which one focuses on the irrelevant spandrels while at the same time pretending to be unable to grasp the arch (“core” or “essence”) of a problem.

In his response, Professor Kemp reduces my critique to four points (P1–P4), which he claims we disagree on and shows why—in his view—I am mistaken. Here, I will order my response according to his four points (2024, 391):

The argument that such a vision is required goes something like this:

(P1) Scientific evidence shows that there was never a time in which there were only two human beings, the ancestors of all other human beings) (= scientific polygenism).

(P2) Catholic theology teaches that there was once a time in which there were only two human beings, the ancestors of all other human beings (= theological monogenism).

So: (P3) With respect to human origins, what scientific evidence shows contradicts what Catholic theology teaches.

So: (P4) Catholic theology has to be revised.

#### Ad P1

I said in my first critique: “Had [Prof. Kemp] adopted a ‘healthy’ science and faith relation, such as the one proposed by Augustine, he would never have had a need to challenge monogenism in the first place” (Chaberek 2024, 156). By this, I mean that there is a methodological arch delineating the scope of science on which all the spandrels of particular scientific concepts hinge. Kemp focuses on the spandrels completely missing the point. So, let me reiterate my point. I quoted Augustine, who says:

When they [enemies of Christianity] produce from any of their books a theory contrary to Scripture, and therefore contrary to the Catholic faith, either we shall have some ability to demonstrate that it is absolutely false, or at least we ourselves will hold it so without any shadow of doubt. (*De Gen. ad Lit.*, I, 21, 41)

Now, Kemp is quite certain that polygenism is an open question for Catholic theology; therefore, Augustine’s phrase “contrary to the Catholic faith” would not apply in this case. I’ll address this problem in Ad P2. Here, it is important to highlight one thing: If there were a situation in which a certain claim (i.e., proven beyond any doubt) about nature would oppose a given interpretation of Scripture or Catholic belief then this belief should be abandoned, because Christians cannot contradict facts of nature. (Kemp rightly observes [2024, 397] that in my critique, I used the word “dogma” in a generic sense, as “something that is believed,” from the Greek δόγμα—“opinion,” “tenet.”)

A clear example of such a situation is found in Galileo’s case. A common belief of his contemporaries was that Scripture taught the immobility of the Earth. Now, living aside all the circumstances and reservations that I mentioned elsewhere (2021, 58–69), the gist of the issue is that science has proven beyond any doubt that the Earth, after all, is in motion. Therefore, the common Scriptural belief had to be abandoned, and the Church had to admit that the Inquisition condemning Galileo was wrong. Obviously, the immobility of the Earth and the mobility of the Sun were not an object

of any clearly defined dogma, but nevertheless, these tenets were justified scripturally and philosophically. The second part of the 1616 condemnation reads:

The earth is not the center of the world, and not immobile, but moves according to the whole of itself, and also by diurnal motion. *Appraisal*: All have said, this proposition to receive the same appraisal in Philosophy [foolish and absurd]; and regarding Theological truth, at least to be erroneous in faith. (Santillana 1955, 121)

Augustine says that Catholics should disprove a theory contrary to faith but even if this is not possible they should still cling to faith against the theory. But in the case of the mobility of the earth, we are not dealing with a theory anymore but something that can be directly<sup>1</sup> observed in real-time; therefore, contradicting it would go against reason.<sup>2</sup> This is precisely what Augustine means when speaking about Christians who talk nonsense about nature when they contradict things “certain from reason and experience” (*De Gen. ad Lit.*, I, 19, 3).

Drawing on the analogy with Galileo we can judge the issue of polygenism in science. The healthy understanding of the relation between faith and science (the one expounded by Augustine) allows us to modify our religious claims only when things that contradict our belief are “certain from reason and experience.” I am sure that Prof. Kemp would agree with me that the scientists’ claim that the origin of humanity from a single couple is impossible due to the genetic evidence is far from being “certain from reason and experience.” But there is more to it, both regarding the (A) actual state of science and (B) the very capacity of scientific research.

#### (A) *Actual state of science*

As I pointed out in my critique, no given study actually excludes the physical possibility of tracing back the human genome into a single pair. Even Ayala’s study implies that it could have happened, just the time needed (about 30M years) is ridiculously too long to accept it (1994, 6789). So Ayala’s

1. Surely, one could say that using a telescope makes an observation indirect.

2. And I do think that Robert Sungenis with his “geocentrism” and “geostatism” makes fideistic claims. Now, whether we can build a cosmological model that would allow for math to work as well with geocentrism as with heliocentrism, or without any “centrism,” is a whole different story. Contrary to what Sungenis says, the fact that today’s science makes room for pretty much any interpretation does not support Sungenis’s claim that Catholics are obliged to believe in geocentrism and geostatism (Sungenis and Bennett 2007, 590–91).

study, indeed, disproves a single couple, but only indirectly, and this exclusion is totally dependent on his assumptions; it does not follow from any “physical” constraints inherent to human genomes, as most people think, and as Kemp incorrectly suggests. Ayala had taken effort to ensure that his conclusion would preclude (indirectly) a single couple origin. To obtain his results, he had carefully chosen the DNA locus and instilled other assumptions to get what he wanted. I pointed out in my critique that Prof. Kemp did not scrutinize the science with an eye on saving traditional faith in monogenism, which is a *sine qua non* condition of a healthy Catholic attitude. Today, we have several studies not only showing the biased approach of Ayala but also presenting alternative models that allow to genetically reduce humanity to a single couple within quite a reasonable timeframe. For instance, one research team claims:

This demonstrates that human genetic data (at least as summarized in the allele frequency spectrum and simple linkage disequilibrium statistics) from non-sex chromosomes is consistent with at least two different but parsimonious models of human origins from a single couple. The model without diversity of the first couple dates to about 2mya ago, whereas the model with primordial diversity has a first couple that lived about 500kya ago. Thus, we show that using assumptions commonly used by evolutionary geneticists, a single-couple origin is possible, despite claims to the contrary. (Hössjer and Gauger 2019, 11)<sup>3</sup>

Therefore, as I said in my critique, there is no scientific reason to tinker with the traditional Catholic belief, because science is ambiguous and has not settled anything contrary to the traditional belief. The fact that most Catholic philosophers and theologians do not know it (or do not want to know it) does not change the reality. It may only point to the fact that we have poor and biased science education which, by default, favors the alleged scientific challenges to traditional Christianity keeping silent over the scientific alternatives.

As a clarification: Prof. Kemp says that I misunderstood Ayala’s paper by thinking that it precludes the tracing of just the SNPs to a single couple. Well, I am not sure if I framed my argument entirely clearly on this point, but first, I explained why Ayala’s type of challenge is not quite realistic (Kemp does not respond to this one), and secondly, I explained why the SNPs type of challenge fails. In his critique, Kemp brings up a third type of argument, that is, the spectacular similarities in the human and chimpanzee genomes.

3. Cf. Hössjer, Ola, Gauger, Reeves 2016.

Since the simian origin of man is not a matter of our polemics, here I will just say that this argument is not less illusory than the other ones.

(B) *Capacity of scientific Research*

What I said would be enough for Catholics to stick with the traditional monogenism, but I believe an extra point should be made. Since any study of the ancient past, by the very nature of the question, must be indirect, i.e., by observing the effects and processes currently in operation, no claim about the distant past would ever have such certainty (and authority) as the claims about currently observed events and processes in nature. In other words, the Galileo case—by the very fact that there is a substantial difference in the question asked—can never happen with the origin of man.<sup>4</sup> We simply do not have a time machine to travel a few million years back to observe how humanity emerged. Indeed, we can observe in real-time the movements of planets, but we cannot observe the origin of species.<sup>5</sup> Now, since Augustine says that we can abandon our belief only if we settle a natural phenomenon as “certain from reason and experience,” which we would commonly call “a fact,” and since such a thing cannot ever happen with polygenism, it follows that science cannot—by the very nature of the issue—disprove the belief in a single couple as an exclusive origin of entire humanity. And this is what Augustine means when he says:

When they produce from any of their books a *theory* contrary to Scripture, and therefore contrary to the Catholic faith, . . . at least we ourselves will hold it [absolutely false] without any shadow of doubt. (*De Gen. ad Lit.*, I,21,41)

Ad P2

Kemp rightly refers my claim that Catholic monogenism must include two points: (1) the “real existence of Adam and Eve” and (2) their being “the exclusive origin of humanity.” As much as he concedes to the first point, on the second, he comments: “The second is unclear both concerning its source and to its meaning” (Kemp 2024, 393). I really don’t know what is or may be unclear with respect to the meaning of this point. That Adam and

4. In the case of Galileo the question was “what are the relative movements and positions of the planets?” In the case of human origins the question is “where an entirely new form of life comes from?” I expand on this distinction in another place (Chaberek 2021, 70–78).

5. For those who have a habit of catching on words (which may suggest a lack of better arguments), I haste to explain that by “species” I understand completely new forms of life, not just new variants of existing species. So, yes, speciation, as understood in modern biology, can be observed, but “the origin of species,” as Darwin imagined, cannot.

Eve were the exclusive origin of humanity means (to borrow the terms from older theologians) that there were no “pre-Adamites,” “co-Adamites,” and “post-Adamites,” i.e. that all people that are alive and ever lived, or will ever live, descended from a single pair of Adam and Eve. I really don’t know how to make this point any clearer.

Regarding the source of this truth, Kemp comments that I “do not quote the phrase from anywhere” (2024, 393), and “the documents which I mention as confirming this perspective do not use it” (ibid). So, let us look into some of the sources I referenced.

Pope Pelagius I, in his solemn confession of faith (in 557), included the following statement:

I confess . . . that all men from Adam onward who have been born and have died up to the end of the world will then rise again and stand before the judgment-seat of Christ, together with Adam himself and his wife, who were not born of other parents, but were created: one from the earth and the other from the side of the man. (DS 443)

There are a bunch of relevant claims in this short formula. First of all, the Pope says that our first parents were not born but created. To be born means to have a biological continuity with a parent through biological generation. The Pope puts “to be born” in direct opposition to “to be created” because to be created means not to have any continuity with any previous being and not to be produced by any natural process. It means to be produced directly by God (i.e., without secondary causes), which also means to be produced supernaturally, i.e., outside of the order of nature (or, as some say, *de novo*).

This clearly contradicts Kemp’s claim that Adam and Eve were born from biological humans because this kind of emergence would biologically connect them with their parents.

I presume that Kemp would respond that on his account these parents were non-human. But Pelagius does not say that Adam and Eve did not have human parents. He says, they had no parents, precisely, because he wants to exclude all of the pagan, Gnostic and mythological believes in which first humans emerged by some kind of transformation (as modern evolutionists believe). So Kemp, to save his thesis in the light of Pelagius’ formula, would need to say that they were no parents at all which contradicts the very idea of being born and reduces his argument *ad absurdum*.

Kemp says that in my sources there is no idea of Adam and Eve being an exclusive origin of humanity. So, how would he explain the Papal phrase: “all men from Adam onward who have been born and have died up to the

end of the world will then . . . stand before the judgment-seat of Christ”? If Adam and Eve were not an exclusive origin of humanity, it would follow these other people (outside of Adam’s lineage) would never stand before the judgment-seat of Christ. Is this what Prof. Kemp means? Or does he believe that those other humans were not born? There is much more to Pope Pelagius’s formula, but I will leave it for another occasion.

My adversary seems to believe that none of my sources has any higher “grade of certainty,” therefore they “can be retained, modified or even abandoned under the guidance of the Church’s Magisterium” (Kemp 2024, 397). I am leaving it to my adversary to judge for himself what kind of Magisterial authority has a solemn, public Papal confession of faith, presented to the King with an explicit intention of explaining what the universal Church believes, and then the same creed being proclaimed to all the faithful.<sup>6</sup>

Just as a corollary to this, we should add Pope Pius II’s condemnation of the following statement (1459):

That God created another world than this one, and that in its time many other men and women existed and that consequently Adam was not the first man. (DS 1363)

At least there were no pre-Adamites for sure, which means there could be no humans before Adam, which again, contradicts Kemp’s theory. Surely, he would respond that these biological humans who lived before Adam were no humans, but this is a word game played on an equivocation (see Ad P3 below). The same is the meaning of the Council of Trent, which anathematizes someone who would not confess that “Adam was the first man, etc.” (The Council of Trent, Session V, 1)

Another document that I referenced was the formula pronounced by the Synod of Cologne in 1860. The timing of this pronouncement is significant because it is right about the time when the “evolutionary hypothesis” of human origins started penetrating the minds of Catholic scholars:

Our first parents were created immediately by God. Therefore we declare that the opinion of those who do not fear to assert that this human being, man as regards his body, emerged finally from the spontaneous continuous change of imperfect nature to the more perfect, is clearly opposed to Sacred Scripture and to the Faith. (*Acta*, 30; my translation)

6. The Pope first pronounced it in a letter to king Childebert I (of 3 February 557), and then repeated it in the letter *Vas electionis* addressed to the whole Church.

Again, first parents were created “directly by God,” which means they were not born from either theological or biological humans. I don’t think this formula is reconcilable with Kemp’s account of human origins:

The origin of the human race lies in God’s infusion of two created rational souls into animal bodies that were themselves the product of evolution, but did not necessarily differ in any significant way from those of the other animals in the population into which they were born. (Kemp 2024, 394)

Pope Leo XIII, in his Encyclical *Arcanum* (1880), not only confirms again the special creation of Adam and Eve but also says something quite relevant to our debate:

We record what . . . cannot be doubted by any, that God, . . . having made man from the slime of the earth, and having breathed into his face the breath of life, gave him a companion, whom He miraculously took from the side of Adam when he was locked in sleep. God thus, in His most far-reaching foresight, decreed that this husband and wife should be the natural beginning of the human race, from whom it might be propagated and preserved by an unending fruitfulness throughout all futurity of time. (Leo XIII 1879, 386)

The Pope says that Adam and Eve were designed by God to be “the natural beginning of the human race, from whom it might be propagated . . . throughout all futurity of time.” Does it not mean that there was no natural beginning of humanity other than Adam and Eve? How can we square it with Kemp’s story, in which the natural beginning of humanity is constituted by “biological humans” who are different from Adam and Eve?

I also referenced the 1909 *Responsum* of the PBC on the historicity of Genesis 1–3, in which we read that (among other things) “the special creation of man; the formation of the first woman out of the first man and the unity of the human race” (EB 334) cannot be doubted as “literal and historical” truths revealed in Genesis. Again, “special creation” literally contradicts “natural generation” (on both counts), and, moreover, Kemp’s idea of division into “biological humans” and “theological humans” contradicts the literal and historical meaning of the “unity of the human race” revealed in Genesis.

These are just a few references, and I am not even going into the teachings of the Fathers and Holy Doctors, who obviously taught and argued the same things, oftentimes more explicitly and with more theological and philosophical context. The Magisterial teachings make it clear that no other interpretation than Adam and Eve being the sole origin of humanity is acceptable.



Even so, Prof. Kemp says:

What one finds in those sources is only: (G1) Adam and Eve are fully human and the ancestors of all other (fully) human beings. One can get from G1 only as far as (G2) Adam and Eve are the only fully human beings who are ancestors of all other (fully) human beings.” What he needs for his criticism of my article to succeed is a different, stronger, thesis which is beyond what his sources assert: (G3) Adam and Eve are the only biologically human beings who are ancestors of all other (fully) human beings. (Kemp 2024, 394)

But these claims are based on the false distinction, because there is nothing like “fully” and “non-fully” humans. Biological human is simply non-human (see Ad P3 below). Therefore, the reasoning is flawed. Even so, Kemp rightly points out that the quoted sources secure G1 and G2, but he misses the fact that they secure one more—an even stronger claim—that Adam and Eve were not born of other parents but created directly by God.

Now, given G1 and G2, and the direct creation of Adam and Eve, logically results in G3, because God did not create any organisms with human bodies other than Adam and Eve. In other words, human body (“biological human”) originated only once with Adam and Eve. So, contrary to what Kemp says, even according to his own standards (in my opinion flawed), his thesis is refuted by the documents I referenced.

### Ad P3

Prof. Kemp believes that his division into biological human and theological human resolves the problem of an apparent contradiction between P1 and P2:

On that scenario, P1 would be true, understood as referring to the biologically human species . . . P2 would be true, understood as referring to the philosophically human species . . . If the common term, “human being,” means something different in the two propositions, then the two propositions do not contradict one another. (Kemp 2024, 395)

Fair enough. But in his solution he is not “making a distinction when faced with contradiction” (Kemp 2011, 236). Instead, he takes one term in two contradictory meanings, depending on the context. So his solution is based not on a “distinction” but on an “equivocation” that he introduces into the term “human being.” A human being is a rational animal. But “biological human” is a non-rational animal, which means it is not human.

Thus, Kemp in P1 is not referring to the same reality that evolutionists do, and therefore, he does not resolve the contradiction, rather, he introduces a smart confusion. He may trick the audience, but he is not resolving the issue. We can picture it with a different example:

- P1. Scientists say laws are unchangeable.
- P2. Congressmen say laws are changeable.

Now, obviously, if scientists meant “laws of nature” and congressmen meant “juridical laws,” the common term “law” would receive two different meanings, and there would be no contradiction between P1 and P2. But this is not what is going on in Kemp’s P1 and P2. Drawing on this analogy—scientists mean “juridical laws,” which is exactly the same as what congressmen mean, and therefore, there is an actual contradiction. Evolutionists, Darwin and his followers, would not agree that evolution produced just irrational animals (biological humans). Quite the contrary, they believe humans (rational animals) are the product of evolution. Kemp allegedly resolves the contradiction by simply imposing on evolutionists what they do not believe.

Strictly speaking, there is no logical fallacy in Kemp’s argument because playing with the meaning of terms while conducting an argument is different from drawing conclusions which do not follow from premises. We could call Kemp’s argument a paradox akin to the paradoxes of the Ancients, such as the paradox of a bald man or the impossibility of local motion. To my taste, offering a playful paradox as a solution to a specific science-faith problem is somewhat silly and not in keeping with the academic spirit.

However, there is a problem with the flawed metaphysics in his argument. Regrettably, Kemp, while providing a long response, did not use the opportunity to clarify his terms such as: “theological species,” “theological men/humans,” “biological species,” “biologically human,” “genetically human-like,” “genetically human,” “non-intellectual human,” etc. even though prompted (Chaberek 2024, 158). From his other statements, at least now, it is clearer that he basically means one division (biological vs. theological human) and that “biological human” is a human body without the human (i.e. rational soul), instead animated by an animal (i.e., sensitive) soul. Kemp makes several claims to the same effect:

Why would the existence of an additional, intellectual, power require an entirely new kind of eyes, or, more to the point, incompatibly different reproductive organs? (Kemp 2024, 396)

There is no reason to think that those bodily organs would have to be different in order to make . . . abstraction possible. (Kemp 2024, 396)

[Chaberek needs to explain] why a particular disposition of matter could not be capable of being informed by either of two different substantial forms, one that merely actualized the organs of that material body and another that did all that in the same way, but in addition included the power of intellect. (Kemp 2024, 396)

Why could God not create, and infuse into animal bodies . . . a substantial form that does everything that their animal soul did, but adding the intellectual powers that would enable them to abstract concepts from the images that the sense powers make possible as well as to make free choices about how to act? (Kemp 2024, 395)

Well, as I said in my critique, the human body with a non-human soul is impossible for both reasons—biological and metaphysical/theological. First, let's reiterate the theological reasons.

The Council of Vienne and the Fifth Lateran Council established as Catholic doctrine (not just a particular tenet of a philosophical system) that the human soul is the substantial form of the human body:

We define that anyone who presumes henceforth to assert, defend, or hold stubbornly that the rational or intellectual soul is not the form of the human body of itself and essentially, is to be considered a heretic (DS 901). The soul not only truly exists of itself and essentially as the form of the human body, . . . but it is also immortal. (DS 1440)

Prof. Kemp believes that the difference between his biological man and theological man consists in the soul rather than the body. If it was the case, the only difference would be in the soul, which means that the only difference between the two would be non-material, and it would boil down to having the faculty of reason (the theological human) vs. not having the faculty of reason (biological human). But having or not this or other faculty constitutes not a substantial but an accidental difference (even if the faculty is of such prominence as reason). This means that the difference between the two (biological and theological human) consists of an accidental difference, not substantial.

Surely, I grant that Kemp says that there is a new substance in the theological man, but the "novelty" of the "new substance" is reduced to the

faculty of reasoning, which contradicts the very notion of the substantial form. So, he nominally claims that the rational soul is a substantial form, but, actually, he reduces it to a faculty which is an accident. And this means that the difference between the theological and biological man is actually only accidental, which means there is no new substantial form in (theological) human, which contradicts the teachings of the Council of Vienne and Lateran V.

Now, let's reiterate why it is not biologically possible to have a human or almost human body without a rational soul. To understand it, we need to adopt a realistic view of nature and animals, which is missing from Kemp's account. One cannot just "imagine" an animal that "God could have created" (Kemp 2024, 395). We are talking about real scenarios in the real world, and we do not ask what God could have done but what God actually did (since God is omnipotent, there are very few things that He could not have done, and these are contradictions in terms, so theistic evolutionists' favorite the "God could have done it" smacks of tautology). Animals in nature go about their lives (which consist of feeding and propagating) thanks to the natural compositions of their bodies which allow them to prey or avoid becoming an easy prey. Each species has some natural weaponry, such as claws, fur, horns, fangs, shells, etc. And if they do not have assaulting characteristics, they have defensive features. So, for instance, a deer has no claws or fangs but it has great smell and hearing, can run swiftly, and, according to its instinct, it is always as if on the lookout. Wherever we look into the animal kingdom, we see all kinds of adaptations to survivability. These adaptations are a condition *sine qua non* for each species to survive in nature.

But humans are the only animals that have no such characteristics in their bodily constitution, neither offensive nor defensive. In fact, humans have a universal, "unadapted" body. So, how is it possible that humans not only survive but thrive, not only thrive but excel many animals in most conditions? This is due to reason—the faculty of thinking which allows us to invent and make all kinds of tools, shelters, and weapons. The reality, therefore, is that either an animal is non-rational—and then it has all kinds of adaptations in its bodily structure, or it has no such adaptations, and then it has to be rational in order to make up for the relative deficiencies of its body. A clear example of it is seen between chimps and humans, according to evolutionists—our "closest cousins." Chimps (unlike humans) have prehensile feet and hands (which adapt them to tree climbing), extraordinary strength in their hands and legs, they have fur (which protects them against weather conditions, insects, etc.), they are quadrupeds, which makes their locomotion energetically more effective, and many more.

Now, Prof. Kemp proposes that there was an animal that had a human body, i.e., unadapted, unspecialized, and yet the animal was deprived of reason. Such a thing is dead in the water. It is biologically impossible. Could God have created such a thing? Obviously, He could. Would it survive in nature? It wouldn't. Could God have changed the entire natural order to allow it to survive? Surely, God could have created an entirely different natural order, as well as an entirely different world. But this is not what we learn from science, and—granting that God does not delude us—we have evidence that this was not the case. So, outside of Prof. Kemp's imagination, such a thing as "biological human" never existed and could never exist in our world.

Additionally, these biological facts explain "why a particular disposition of matter could not be capable of being informed by either of two different substantial forms" (Kemp 2024, 396). In fact, these facts shed a lot of light on how one should understand the substantial form, which is the human soul, and what it actually takes to create a disposition in matter for receiving an entirely new kind of substantial form. When God infused the soul into Adam, He created his body from scratch in order to make it adapted to the requirements of the rational soul. Humans differ so much from animals because our bodies are adapted to perform rational functions. This is helped by many qualities of the human body, including the erect posture, free hands (in basic locomotion), an opposite thumb, very skillful hands with highly specific finger coordination, and the great harmony between the senses, just to name a few. All of these obvious differences between brutes and humans are completely ignored and/or inexplicable on Kemp's account.

#### Ad P4

I already made comments on the alleged need for a revision of Catholic theology due to "scientific polygenism." There is no such need. So, we should turn to theology. Prof. Kemp spends some time on explaining that there are different grades of certainty among theological theses and "While there are truths that it would be heretical to deny, there are others the denial of which would not be heretical, but would still be rash" (2024, 397) Surely, these are non-controversial claims, but these are spandrels. It really does not matter which level of theological certainty (out of twenty or so) one attaches to a given testimony if there is nothing on the opposite side. The arch question is not how "infallible" and "unchangeable" are the documents quoted in P2 but whether there is better support for polygenism or monogenism in Church teachings, tradition, and the Bible. There is not a single Magisterial document supporting polygenism. On the

contrary, Catholic evolutionists' favorite document, the 1950 encyclical *Humani Generis*, does not even allow for discussions on polygenism. How Catholic evolutionists (such as Kemp) go about it without a blink of an eye is a mystery.

Given that science does not require any modification from theology (See P1) there is no reason to even begin an enterprise like the one proposed by Prof. Kemp. And this is why I said his understanding of science and faith was unhealthy and that he judged theology by science, giving science undue priority, while misquoting Augustine, who proposed an exact opposite. (Kemp writes he said no such things (2024, 397), but I did not claim that he said it; rather, it was an overall conclusion from his different proposals). Giving science priority when it has not and cannot settle the matter in question, at the same time ignoring the overwhelming teachings of Magisterial documents, holy Fathers, and Doctors, is unhealthy, to say the least.

We should also take a more general note on the question of truth. The Church has condemned on multiple occasions a belief that there can be a contradiction between philosophical (which includes scientific) truth and truth of faith. This condemnation stems from a rather common-sense conviction that since God is the Author of both nature and Scripture there would be no contradictions between the two. Regardless, Prof. Kemp consistently draws on distinctions such as “biological human” vs. “theological human.” Does it mean that humanity (what he calls “full” or “true” humanity) is scientifically undetectable? If it is detectable, then how? If the real humans (theological) differ from the non-real humans (biological) only by their soul, then how can the difference be scientifically established?

Obviously, science defines humans as humans based on biological features—humans are those that have the human genome, the human phenotype, and are born from other humans. But on Kemp's account, one cannot tell the difference, because biological and theological humans are biologically identical.<sup>7</sup> I am not even mentioning any of the moral problems that come with his ideas.

7. Kemp could respond that scientists could establish the difference by, e.g., detecting in “theological humans” the ability to formulate rational thought such as the one we find in the human language. But on this account theological humans, who by any chance cannot speak, or articulate intelligent thoughts (as it happens with many mental disorders) could not be qualified as theological humans.

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# Nicolai Hartmann: Review of Vasily Sesemann's *The Logical Laws and Being*<sup>1</sup>

Alicja Pietras, Predrag Cicovacki

This book is the continuation of two older works from 1927, which were published under the common title "*Studien zum Erkenntnisproblem. Teil 1. Über gegenständliches und ungegenständliches Wissen; Teil II. Rationales und Irrationales*" ["Study of the Problem of Cognition. Part I. On Objective and Non-objective Knowledge; Part II. Rational and Irrational"]. The connections between these previous works, which together are almost the same length as this new essay, and the latter, are so strong that the unity of the whole is readily observable in the parts. Regrettably, these three parts did not appear together as one book. This is even more unfortunate because, while there is certainly an interest in such works in the circle of German professionals, it is difficult for a series of publications by a foreign university with predominantly foreign-language contributions to make an impact on the German book market. I feel that for these reasons, even more than would otherwise be the case, it is my duty to draw the attention of professional philosophers to this significant and in some respects unique work.

1. This is a translation of Nicolai Hartmann's review of Vasily Sesemann's book-length essay "*Die logischen Gesetze und das Sein*" (*Eranus*, Bd. II, Kowno 1932, pp. 60–230), which appeared in 1933 in *Kant – Studien* under the title: „Sesemann, Wilhelm, *Die logischen Gesetze und das Sein*" (Book Review) (*Kant-Studien*; Jan 1, 1933, vol. 38, pp. 227–32) and was also republished in the third part of Hartmann's *Kleinere Schriften* under the title "Zu Wilhelm Sesemann, 1933" (Nicolai Hartmann, *Kleinere Schriften. Band III. Vom Neukantianismus zur Ontologie*, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1953, 368–74).

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It would be a mistake to judge this book by its title. It deals much more with “being” than with “logical laws.” It is not a logical investigation, but entirely an ontological one. It thereby reaches into an area of problems that is nowadays both central and, in a positive sense, current in contemporary theoretical philosophy. No one would deny that in our time the problem of being has reached a certain maturity. But what has actually been achieved so far? A “turn to ontology” is often called for, and there is no shortage of thinkers who, in the spirit of the prevailing historicism, philosophize about this turn as if it were a phenomenon of our time. This, however, is not the way to tackle this newly developed area of problems. When one takes a closer look at what has actually been achieved, one finds neither any real attempt to formulate the issues involved, nor any properly pursued path of research beyond the posing of the most external and general preliminary questions—like the question of the “meaning” of being [“*Sinn*” *des Seins*], or of the relation between knowledge and being. Furthermore, even the answers that are proposed to these questions are repeatedly borrowed from old speculative *weltanschaulich*<sup>2</sup> standpoints, or—which is hardly less problematic—from other adjacent problem areas whose established methods are taken and applied here: over and over again, we see this happening in relation to logic, epistemology, phenomenology, and even the philosophy of history and sociology. It is thus no wonder that the sense of ontological inquiry goes missing. As a result, we still do not have the proclaimed ontology. All we have is the announcement of a “turn” towards it.

Sesemann’s book offers us something quite different. Here we encounter neither just talk “about” ontology, nor a mere introduction to it. The author does not even attempt the latter. He goes straight to the point. That this is a genuine ontological investigation, and one that must be understood as such, becomes ever clearer as we follow its progress, and more so than any review can convey. Its significance lies entirely in its content, and the formulation of its questions and its approach can only be assessed from the standpoint of the latter. And this content is indeed significant. The work actually pursues at least a portion of what may be considered the basic ontological questions. The fact that the exploration begins from an oppositional relation to the laws of logic only plays the role of a starting point, which gradually recedes over the course of the investigation.

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

Logical structure differs from the structure of being in terms of two aspects: that of the subject, and that of the object. Accordingly, the work is divided into two parts. The first deals with the relation between the laws of logic and "subject-related and mental being" [*subjektbezogenen und psychischen Sein*], while the second deals with the relation between the former and an "autonomous being" [*daseinsautonomen Sein*]. Consciousness is very far from being completely subordinate to logical structures. We are all well aware of the alogicity in our emotional life. But far less known and researched is the fact that theoretical consciousness also exhibits quite definite limits to the logical. Not everything that we grasp is objectively determined [*gegenständlich bestimmt*]. Logical laws are laws of determination [*Gesetze der Bestimmtheit*]; where indeterminacy begins, the failure of logical structure also commences. However, this does not apply to everything that is not grasped conceptually. Rather, our perception of things shows, and also points us to, this dimension of everything connected with our conceptualization of substantial certainty and logical unambiguity, thanks to the peculiar character which it shares with the realm of thought. This character is the predominance of spatiality and the static aspect in the presented world of objects.

It has probably always been noticed that logical structure is characterized by stasis and timelessness; only extreme psychologism failed to recognize this, and it is precisely for this reason that it cannot be maintained. Far stranger than that, however, is the fact that there is also a very noticeable dominance of the spatial-static in the world of perception. The preponderance of the sense of sight in our everyday worldview, even, is proof of this. This aspect can be still more effectively characterized as a reification [*Verdinglichung*] of everything that is perceived. There is thus a striking analogy between the perceived world of things and the world of concepts. And it is precisely this analogy that enables the easy conversion of what is perceived into conceptual form. However, the case is quite different with the full phenomenal content of perception. What cannot be completely reduced to an object-form of thingness includes colors, brightness, shadows, noises, smells, and much more, yet all of that is, as it were, covered up by the same aspect of thingness. "Here is a quite definite view of the external world, a view that is still pre-conceptual, but that nevertheless partly hides the originally phenomenally given, partly modifies it not inessentially." Thus, one must also compare the logical laws directly with this original phenomenal content; indeed, one has to further rely on the "inner perception" that mediates within the psychological reality.

In pursuing this task, a series of thoroughly ontological moments appear. The most salient amongst these are those of "indistinctness" [*Undeutlichkeit*]

and “indeterminacy” [*Unbestimmtheit*] accompanying various levels of perception. Sesemann, in a masterly piece of analysis, shows how indeterminacy is not a mere epiphenomenon that only arises in subsequent reflection as a result of gaps in memory, as it can be shown to be internal to the original perception itself, in which the form of “empty space” of the overall view [*die Form von „Leerstellen“ der Gesamtauffassung*] is already present. This sequence of appearances is further completed in the represented world [*Vorstellungswelt*]; it presents itself there as a certain fogginess of content that urges one to seek determination, and which increases in “dreams” [*Traumgesichts*], right up to “shifts and identifications” that are such as to remove any clarity whatsoever from the object. Their variations in the field of inner perception turn out to be completely overwhelming. Consciousness is mainly focused on thingness, but here it has to deal with a content that inherently makes a mockery of the latter. And without thingness, the objectivity of perception fails as well; that which is non-objective does not reveal the principles of logic.

Even so, all of this is just a prelude. The more serious part of the problem lies in the relation between the laws of logic and the real external world—or, as the title of the second part puts it, the “autonomous being” [*daseinsautonomen Sein*]. The basic feature of this being is “mobility” [*Bewegtheit*], “becoming” [*Werden*] in the broad sense. Spatial “movement” [*Bewegung*] in the narrow sense is only part of it. But this part can be used as an example to develop the basic relation. This is where the second part of the investigation begins.

Ancient thought was completely dominated by the laws of logic; it made their validity a “criterion of true reality.” That is the meaning of Zeno’s arguments that deny the reality of motion. Reinach’s interpretation, which wanted to limit the contradiction contained in these paradoxes to the level of appearance, cannot be upheld. Motion has a temporal duration, but Zeno dissolved it into a series of stages, each of which is timeless and presented as “being in . . .” (namely, in one point or location). This is the reason why the stages are not merged into a continuum of one event. But more important is that even the modern physical conception of motion, despite all appearances, continues to pursue a similar spatialization of the temporal, even though it grasps the time-component in every manifestation. It transforms time into just “one more dimension” alongside the spatial ones, from which, in a mathematical context, it is indistinguishable. It also fails to in any way capture the continuous character of temporal flow as such. Its conception of time is abstract: “motion is frozen by the conceptual determination inherent to physics,” while physical time is merely a “logical abbreviation of real concrete time.”

To explain this state of affairs, Sesemann deploys the concept of the past in a new and expanded sense. Physical considerations adhere to the continuity of time, but there is also continuity where the flow has already stopped. Real time, by contrast, is the flow itself. If one ignores this and puts all of the emphasis on continuity, one is effectively spatializing time. As past, the temporality of motion is spatialized, and it appears as something finished and completed, as a stretch of time [*Zeitstrecke*] that can be presented and measured without any difference in a stretch of space [*Raumstrecke*]. Reduced to the mode of the past, time then becomes a "uniformity" in which the contrast of "now" to "not yet" and "no longer" has disappeared. Spatialization is at the same time an objectification of time and motion. But the original phenomenal content of time and motion has been lost, for this content is characterized precisely by the dynamic of presence as well as by the tension between the present and the future. These moments primarily constitute the "presentness" [*Aktualität*]<sup>3</sup> of time.

That opens up a broad perspective: "motion exists in this way and by the fact that it will and can still exist." Only in that manner is motion present—but that way, it is necessarily unfinished. It is a unity, but not a totality. The totality of motion means its sublation [*Aufhebung*]. As long as motion continues, it is characteristically an *apeiron*. This means that it retains a certain indeterminacy at every stage; it can change at the very next moment, but it can also continue unchanged, or pass in silence. As long as it lasts, there is always a "multitude of possibilities" in it. Because of that, at every present moment it is missing an unequivocal, and in itself finished, determination. This means that its appearances reveal contradictory determinations. It follows from this, then, that motion is not subsumable under the laws of logic.

What holds for motion also holds for becoming in general, and since everything real is temporal and in the process of becoming, the same is valid for the whole realm of real being. Science tends to assume across the board that real being, which it cognizes, is subordinate to the law of logic; it rationalizes this by taking presentness away from becoming, by eliminating indeterminacy, and by projecting the living flow into the past. Science thereby misses the essential characteristic of *apeiron*; it always partially misses that which it is cognizing—namely, real being. There is a constant

3. The easiest way to translate the German term *Aktualität* would be *actuality*, but since the English term *actuality* has been used to translate the German *Wirklichkeit*, we have decided to use another word. This choice is justified mostly by the fact that *Wirklichkeit* is one of the basic terms of Hartmann's ontology, and so should not be confused with any other term. Therefore, in the present text the German *Aktualität* is translated as *presentness*, and the German *Wirklichkeit* as *actuality*.

process of determination in the process of becoming, in which the development of that process consists, but also a constant succession of remaining areas of indeterminacy. The conception in question grasps the former aspect but misses the latter; yet even the former is misconstrued by it as being merely a determinant and not the full process of determination. For the concept, the *apeiron* of an ongoing present happening remains an irresolvable antinomy. This is because the *apeiron* is simultaneously determined and undetermined.

The investigation then turns into a modal analysis. The indeterminacy of becoming in the present ontologically presupposes a “multiplicity of possibilities” as a kind of future horizon. What is possible now is bound up with certain conditions, and for every point in time these are located in the past; yet those conditions by no means form an antecedently closed totality, for it is rather the case that they themselves only appear together during the course of the process. So long as they are not all obtaining together, various things are still “possible.” Each now “realizes” one of many possibilities, and at the same time creates a new situation in which further possibilities are opened up. Every situation in the occurrence [*Geschehen*] is definitely determined, but it also forms the “potency” of a certain series of possibilities. The progress of the process is therefore always a determination of indeterminacy and at the same time a realization of one of the possibilities; the remaining possibilities thereby all simultaneously become impossible.

As an ontological conception, such a notion of possibility is by no means without difficulties. It is obvious that only that in respect of which all conditions are present together is ontically possible; if only one is missing, it is rather “impossible.” But it is different with ideal possibility, logical possibility, and even epistemic possibility. These kinds of possibilities are only partial possibilities; they are not real possibilities. So, is the “multiplicity of possibilities”—and with it, also, the indeterminacy in becoming—ontologically illusory? If this were true, there would be no leeway for possibility alongside actuality in real being. Possibility and actuality would have to coincide, and the consequence would be that possibility could not be, originally, a category of being at all, but only one of cognition: it could only be falsely carried over from consciousness into real being. Sesemann resolves this difficulty by including modal problems into the temporality of becoming. Real possibility is connected with the presentness of the “now” and its double aspect. But the “now” is itself in a state of flux. What is possible is itself the possibility of an actuality, and this belongs to the future but has its conditions in the past. In the sphere of real occurrences [*Geschehens*], the conditions for what is possible are also never completed, because so long as the event

is still occurring, it remains unfinished in its totality. The totality itself "is" not, but rather "becomes." When it reaches its completeness, the occurrence [*Geschehen*] comes to an end; the possibility turns into actuality. It then no longer belongs to the future, but rather to the past.

This is the crux of the investigation. It is obvious that, through this inclusion, static possibility is contrasted with dynamic possibility, and the consequence of the analysis is that genuine real possibility is, in general, just real temporal and dynamic possibility. It is not surprising that, for the sake of its logical structure, science subordinates everything that it grasps in real being to the category of static possibility. It freezes mobility and temporality, and in this frozen world there is no longer any openness to the horizon of the future. The implications of this result are far-reaching. They concern highly concrete issues: the impact of discreteness in a global context, the autonomy of subsystems, the structure of the world's events, the problem of determination and scientific predictions, the concepts of development and of freedom. They ultimately lead to a stratified ordering of what is possible—which, unfortunately, has been no more than hinted at all too briefly. It is only at the highest stratum that the fundamental potency of the possible is actually revealed: "It makes possible the being-for-itself and freedom of the spirit, it creates the foundation for knowledge and science, and opens for consciousness the access to the world of the ideal."

Clearly, the outcome of these investigations is not a limiting of the scope of the laws of logic. It leads to some insights about such laws—for instance, some new and weighty acknowledgements of types of irrationality—where this forms the topic of the last chapter of the book. But much more important are the internal elaborations of the problems themselves. What has already been elucidated shows them to concern the theory of categories. Motion, becoming, process, time, possibility, and actuality—all these are fundamental categories of being. That the moments of validity are consciously distinguished as categories of cognition and of being—a distinction that cannot be understood from a purely logical point of view—is something that should be taken to be of particular value here. This becomes abundantly clear inasmuch as right from the very outset the investigation transcends its strictly and narrowly defined subject matter and enters into the great problem area of determinism and indeterminism, of freedom, and of necessity and contingency. And it is no coincidence that precisely the latter questions shed new and bright light on the investigation—an outcome that I cannot spell out here, but that is implicit in the above exposition.

The secret of such an astonishing and unexpected result ultimately lies, in my opinion, in the viability of the approach. No "theory" is advocated

here, no point of view represented; behind it lies no preconceived worldview that is to be proven or even just made to appear convincing. It is rather simply a series of phenomena examined in a work of diligence. The selecting and relating of these phenomena are, however, determined by certain permanent problems at the crossroads of logic, epistemology and ontology. These are ones that owe their maturity to the current state of knowledge, and should be of interest to anyone whose thought is rooted in the latter. I would therefore like to present this investigation as an illustrative example of purely problem-oriented research—in contrast to every kind of research that is speculative, constructive, or predetermined by a certain worldview. It is a kind of approach that pursues exclusively the path opened up by problems themselves, without presupposing any worldview and without trying to achieve an all-encompassing point of view based on just the study being conducted. This is one that we rarely encounter in its pure form, especially within the area of heavily metaphysically burdened fundamental questions of being and the world—but it is nevertheless one that should be adopted for the entire field of philosophical problems.

At a time when, even in philosophy, thought seeks the sensational and follows fashionable trends, the incorruptible sobriety of such a book is extraordinarily beneficial. Today, many people hardly know how this sort of pure approach to thinking through problems works. Here they can learn it—quickly and concisely, without the risk of falling into the traps that thought itself can lead one into, or getting locked inside the cage of a system.

One need not agree with every detail of something to embrace it with admiration. I myself have my own doubts here on many points, but I have also found that this work, which is so well thought-out, leaves hanging some outstanding questions of critical importance. This this is so is certainly an inevitable consequence of the brevity of the presentation. After all, what can we say about such an outcome if someone else presents different results? Well, that is surely just a symptom of the openness and incompleteness of all basic problems, an indicator of the vitality of research as it relates to the ongoing historical progress of any far-reaching discussion. Therefore, it seems to me that it is unnecessary to add to this review any critical analysis: to do so would just be to bring in someone else's opinion, against which further objections could be raised as well, and so on. Nobody is obligated to provide authoritatively final results. The lively progress of research can itself lead to further clarifications of problems, and it seems to fair to say that Sesemann's book achieves a significant step in this positive direction.



# Contemporary Phenomenology Facing the Problems of Modernity

## Report from the Debate

*Michał Zalewski*

On February 28th, 2025, another of the online debates organized periodically by the Ignatianum University in Cracow took place. The subject of the discussion was the book *Niepewność fenomenu. Fenomenologia w horyzontach nowoczesności* (*The Uncertainty of the Phenomenon. Phenomenology in the Horizons of Modernity*) by Iwona Lorenc (University of Warsaw), published by the University of Warsaw Publishing House in 2024. The book comprises a selection of texts published over the years, which have now been compiled and republished in a new form, in addition to two texts presented for the first time. It demonstrates the post-Heideggerian paradigm of practicing phenomenology, as represented by thinkers such as Patočka, Merleau-Ponty, Ricoeur, Barbaras, Dufrenne, Maldiney and Escoubas, among others. This paradigm aims to address the existential situation of the subject in late modernity, characterized by self-criticism, a lack of solid ground, and internal antagonism. The texts contained within Lorenc's book reveal the interplay of tensions between essence and appearance, communal and individualized ways of being in the world, and the normativity of projects and cultural fluidity, demonstrating how contemporary phenomenology intersects with these problem horizons. This constitutes a novel form of phenomenology that counterpoises the universal claims of reason to what transcends its limits, such as the plurality, fragility, or unpredictability of human experience. In addition to the author, the debate featured the following guests (in order of presentation of papers): Jacek Migasiński (University of Warsaw), Monika Murawska

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(Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw), and Jarosław Jakubowski (Kazimierz Wielki University in Bydgoszcz). The debate was moderated by Magdalena Kozak (Ignatianum University in Cracow). It was broadcast via the Webex platform (by Cisco) and streamed live on the YouTube channel of Ignatianum University.

Following a concise overview of the publication given by the author, the primary paper in the debate, entitled *Hermeneutyka jako koło ratunkowe fenomenologii* (*Hermeneutics as the Lifeline of Phenomenology*), was presented by Migasiński. In the opening remarks, the speaker underscored the foundational aspect of Lorenc's theorizing: namely, the notion of late modernity as a cognitive disposition of culture. The fundamental characteristic of this condition is a loss of ontological security, an uncertainty resulting from the inconclusive positioning of the subject in the world. However, as Migasiński noted, this neither delights nor frightens the author; on the contrary, it opens the field for her to reflect on ways of dealing with such a cultural situation. Migasiński further noted that Lorenc privileges the new phenomenology among possible solutions, for it (taking inspiration from Heidegger) introduces discourse in place of the transcendental subject, also reaching the affective side of human behavior. Its proponents advocate corporeality, the horizon of facticity, and the rehabilitation of appearances, which, as Migasiński demonstrates, opens up new methodological possibilities. The author of the talk stressed that what characterizes Lorenc's point of view is the intersection of phenomenology and hermeneutics. The utilization of hermeneutic methods in phenomenology emerges as a valid postulate when confronted with the intricacies of the late modern context, serving as a crucial lifeline. Finally, the question was posed as to whether these methodologies could reach the pre-lingual as a source of the phenomenalization of the world.

In her response, Lorenc underlined the interconnections between hermeneutics and phenomenology, invoking the perspective of Paul Ricoeur, who characterized Edmund Husserl's philosophy as a hermeneutic undertaking. She identified the hermeneutic elements of Husserl's thought, including the presence of the subject in a pre-existing signifying world and the concept of genetic phenomenology, which she regarded as having a profoundly hermeneutic character insofar as it aims to demonstrate the genesis of meaning. Concomitantly, she acknowledged that the philosophical-hermeneutic project faces some challenges, such as identifying the pre-linguistic conditions of the possibility of experiencing meaning and advancing the study of language functions other than that of signification. In her opinion, art, with its sensitivity to sense/meaning and sensual means, and constituting

a universe that precedes the division between word and thing, can play a considerable role in this process.

This was followed by Murawska's paper, entitled *Niepewność niedokończonego projektu—nowoczesność, romantyzm, fenomenologia* (*Uncertainty of the Unfinished Project—Modernity, Romanticism, Phenomenology*). In it, the author referred to Agata Bielik-Robson's thesis on unfinished Romanticism and wondered whether Lorenc's thought on late modern phenomenal uncertainty could be placed within the perspective of Romanticism. Murawska's position was that post-phenomenology emerges in Lorenc's book, like romanticism in Bielik-Robson's, as a new form of rationality. In both cases, the subject is understood as something more than the Cartesian *cogito*. In both cases, it submits to the influence of reality without rejecting it in an idealistic way. The second common element identified by Murawska is the apotheosis of poetry: Lorenc dedicates significant attention to the language of poetry, demonstrating the transformative potential of literature in facilitating a deeper connection between the subject and the world. The third element consists in the essential features of Romanticism identified by Robson: namely, metaphysics and individuation. According to Murawska, these are present in Lorenc's take on post-phenomenology, where metaphysics is expressed as a need and individuation as the experience of trauma and anxiety.

In the second part of her presentation, Murawska lauded the concept of intertwining phenomenology with late modernity. She suggested that this integration replaces traditional notions of phenomenological certainty with a more dynamic array of uncertainty, fiction, and ephemerality. According to Murawska, this shift liberates phenomenology from its established boundaries, propelling it into new, unexplored territories. In Murawska's view, the uncertainty of the phenomenon, as elaborated by Lorenc, shows the path that phenomenology has taken, becoming, in a sense, the opposite of itself—from the philosophy of certainty to the apotheosis of the uncertain phenomenon.

In response, Lorenc recognized that the analogy with Romanticism provides an interesting trajectory for analyzing late modernity. She concurred that post-phenomenology has the characteristics of Romanticism, understood, following Bielik-Robson, as a form of rationality negotiating between Cartesianism and transgression. The two currents express a sensitivity to the fluidity and elusiveness of phenomenal articulations; both emphasize the messianic role of the aesthetic, and in both can be found motifs of longing for nature, a return to childhood, a withdrawal to the sources of experience. Lorenc invoked Friedrich Schelling's polarity of the

natural and the ideal, pointing to the dialectic between the visible and the invisible that, according to her, post-phenomenology extends to the entire epoch. Furthermore, she emphasized the original romantic nature of engaged reason, which is not outside the world but present in multiple immersion strategies.

The final presentation, delivered by Jakubowski, bore the title *Poświadczenie niewypowiedzianego* (*Attestation of the Unspeakable*). The author referred to the category of ontological security that Lorenc has adopted from Anthony Giddens, and in this context he pondered the optimal utilization of the term “uncertainty.” He regarded this concept as predominantly cognitive, whereas the question of ontological security pertains to the order of praxis. Furthermore, Jakubowski argued that the category of certainty-uncertainty is solitary and has no reference to relationality, so he asked whether, for example, the concept of disorientation would not work better in a given context. A departure from the purely cognitive sphere can also be offered by the Ricoeurian category of attestation which, in Jakubowski’s view, better describes the drama unfolding between experience and the one who experiences.

For Jakubowski, the most salient question remains that of pure phenomenality (to which the new phenomenology gravitates): the transcending of phenomena as filled with content. Citing Jean-François Lyotard’s concept of figurality, he underscored a certain tension between the individual experiencing and the very phenomenality (appearing itself). He further explored the implications of this dichotomy for the status of the attester, inquiring about the methods by which the attester can recognize or identify themselves within this complex framework.

In response, Lorenc acknowledged that the difference pointed out by Jakubowski affects how the “I” experiences itself. A state of fragmentation characterizes the subject experiencing this distinction. However, Lorenc emphasized that this rupture should not be evaded through the purging of phenomena of their content elements, as this would risk resulting in an empty universality. Lorenc underscored that this is not the direction of her considerations. Instead, she advocated accepting non-identity, tension, and inseparability between the manifestation and its content. Addressing the issue of ontological security, Lorenc stressed that within phenomenology, it is not conceptualized at the theoretical level but rather within the framework of *praxis*, while maintaining the interconnectedness of these two spheres. In this manner, phenomenology undertakes the task of restoring humanity’s lost unity with the world. The author acknowledged the complexity of this undertaking within the context of postmodern practices.

Concepts such as Merleau-Ponty's perceptual faith, Maldiney's and Marc Richir's openness to the event, or Lyotard's childhood of thought may prove beneficial. In alignment with the Ricoeurian concept of trust suggested by Jakubowski, Lorenc proposed the category of *amor fati* as a formula for consenting to uncertainty.

Finally, Lorenc addressed two inquiries posed by observers of the debate in the chat room. The first pertained to the capacity of phenomenology, as elucidated by the book, to address the issue of the new materialism. The author replied that this subject had been touched upon in her book, particularly in the section where she discusses the experience of landscape. However, she clarified that this is not her specific area of research interest. The second inquiry concerned the difficulties of contemporary phenomenology. Lorenc acknowledged its numerous challenges and said that there is no single fundamental difficulty. The book, like the debate, confirmed the existence of tensions and paradoxes that can help us arrive at the realization that being in modernity requires, on the one hand, immersion and identification and, on the other, a certain distance and skepticism—where between these two attitudes there is a situation of continuous tension.

All book debates organized by the Institute of Philosophy of Ignatianum University in Cracow are available online (in Polish) on the Ignatianum University YouTube channel.



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*Forum Philosophicum* is a scholarly journal that seeks new insights into philosophical discussions concerning the relationship between philosophy and faith. The tradition we are rooted in is that of Christian philosophy, understood as the independent exercise of reason in the context of the faith. However, we also welcome proposals that flow from the concerns important to philosophers shaped by other religious traditions, in particular those of Jewish or Muslim heritage. We seek articles that are able to engage in critical debate with evolving views on rationality and its relationship to the irrational, the indeterminate, and the non-binary, and look forward to receiving analyses that discuss the place of faith and the rationality of faith in such contexts. We encourage discussions of human nature and spirituality that seek to address the proposals of neuroscience and confront the declarations of posthumanists, as well as inquiries into that mode of philosophizing which, while resting on the hermeneutics of culture, gives special emphasis to the hermeneutics of sacred texts. We would like to distinguish our journal by means of its unique approach, rather than through the specificity of the subjects we are prepared to see raised in it: an approach that allows faith to shape, enlighten, and strengthen rationality itself. In this way, we want to offer a true Forum for the community of philosophers who view their faith as a source of inspiration, especially when seeking to face up to the new and challenging forms being given to the age-old problems of philosophy.

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4. Reviewers are explicitly asked to focus on the research and philosophical merits of a paper; they are told that any linguistic and/or technical deficiencies pertaining to an otherwise good paper may be dealt with separately by the editors.
5. The reviewers are asked to conclude their review with a clear opinion, stating that a paper is (a) publishable without revisions, or (b) may be published after minor revisions have been introduced, or (c) may be resubmitted after major revision, or (d) should not be considered for publication at all.
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