

*THE ANALYSIS
OF WONDER*

*An Introduction to the Philosophy
of Nicolai Hartmann*

PREDRAG CICOVACKI

B L O O M S B U R Y

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*For Heidi:
Keep Shining*

“A man does not learn to understand anything unless he loves it.”

Goethe

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Chronological Table¹

- 1882 Nicolai Hartmann was born on February 20, in Riga, son of Carl August Hartmann and his wife Helene, who were Baltic Germans. Nicolai was one of their four children.
- 1897 Attends a German-speaking gymnasium in Saint Petersburg.
- 1902–03 Studies Medicine in Dorpat.
- 1903–05 Studies philosophy and classical languages in Saint Petersburg.
- 1905–07 Continuation of studies in Marburg.
- 1907 Defends PhD thesis: “*Über das Seinsproblem in der griechischen Philosophie vor Plato*” [On the Problem of Being in Greek Philosophy before Plato].
- 1907–08 Returns to Saint Petersburg to teach Greek and Latin in a gymnasium.
- 1909 Defends the Habilitation: “*Des Proklus Diadochus philosophische Anfangsgründe der Mathematik*” [The Philosophical Foundations of Mathematics of Proclus Diadochus].
Publication of *Platos Logik des Seins* [Plato’s Logic of Being].
- 1911 Marries Alice Stephanitz.
- 1912 Publication of *Die philosophischen Grundfragen der Biologie* [The Fundamental Philosophical Questions of Biology].
Birth of daughter Dagmar.
- 1914–18 Service in German Military in World War I.
- 1919–25 University Professor of Philosophy in Marburg.

¹ The chronological table is mostly based on Martin Morgenstern, *Nicolai Hartmann zur Einführung* (Hamburg: Junius Verlag, 1997), 14–28 and 191–2. Also used are Robert Heiss, “Nicolai Hartmann: A Personal Sketch,” *Personalist* 42:1961, 469–86; *Nicolai Hartmann und Heinz Heimsoeth im Briefwechsel*, ed. Frida Hartmann and Renate Heimsoeth (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag Herbert Grundmann, 1978); Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Philosophical Apprenticeships*, trans. R. R. Sullivan (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985); and Wolfgang Harich: *Nicolai Hartmann—Leben, Werk, Wirkung*, ed. Martin Morgenstern (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2000).

- 1921 Publication of *Grundzüge einer Metaphysik der Erkenntnis* [Basic Elements of a Metaphysics of Knowledge].
- 1923 Publication of *Die Philosophie des deutschen Idealismus*, Bd. I: *Fichte, Schelling und die Romantik* [The Philosophy of German Idealism, Vol. 1: Fichte, Schelling and the Romantics].
- 1925–30 Professor in Cologne.
- 1926 Presents “Über die Stellung der ästhetischen Werte im Reich der Werte überhaupt” [On the Place of Aesthetic Values in the Realm of Values] at the Sixth International Congress of Philosophy, at Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts.
Publication of *Ethik* [Ethics].
Divorce from his first wife.
- 1929 Marries Frida Rosenfeld.
Publication of *Die Philosophie der deutschen Idealismus*, Bd. II: *Hegel* [The Philosophy of German Idealism, Vol. 2: Hegel].
- 1930 Presents “Kategorien der Geschichte” [Categories of History] at the Seventh International Congress of Philosophy, in Oxford.
Birth of son Olaf.
- 1931–45 Professor in Berlin.
- 1932 Birth of daughter Lise.
- 1933 Publication of *Das Problem des geistigen Seins: Untersuchungen zur Grundlegung der Geschichtsphilosophie und der Geisteswissenschaften* [The Problem of Spiritual Being: Investigations on the Foundations of the Philosophy of History and the Human Sciences].
- 1935 Publication of *Zur Grundlegung der Ontologie* [On the Foundations of Ontology].
- 1938 Publication of *Möglichkeit und Wirklichkeit* [Possibility and Actuality].
- 1940 Publication of *Der Aufbau der realen Welt: Grundriss der allgemeinen Kategorienlehre* [The Structure of the Real World: Outline of a Theory of the General Categories].
- 1943 Publication of *Neue Wege der Ontologie* [New Ways of Ontology].
- 1945–50 Professor in Göttingen.

- 1950 Publication of *Philosophie der Natur: Abriss der speziellen Kategorienlehre* [Philosophy of Nature: Sketch of a Theory of the Special Categories].
Dies on October 9.
- 1951 Posthumous publication of *Teleologisches Denken* [Teleological Thinking].
- 1953 Posthumous publication of *Ästhetik* [Aesthetics].
- 1955–58 Posthumous publication of *Kleinere Schriften* [Shorter Works], Bd. I: *Abhandlungen zur Systematischen Philosophie* (1955) [Vol. I: Essays Concerning Systematic Philosophy]; Bd. II: *Abhandlungen zur Philosophie-Geschichte* (1957) [Vol. II: Essays on the History of Philosophy]; Bd. III: *Vom Neukantianismus zur Ontologie* (1958) [Vol. III: From Neo-Kantianism to Ontology].

Introduction: Does Hartmann Matter?

A few years ago, a book was published with the title, *Why Arendt Matters*.¹ In the case of Hannah Arendt, such consideration is hardly needed. Her analysis of the human condition, the origin of totalitarianism, and the banality of evil belong to the highlights of the twentieth-century philosophy, especially in its second half. While she may not get all the recognition she deserves, especially among philosophers, Arendt's ideas are widely discussed and her books are available even in small bookstores.

This is not the case with Nicolai Hartmann (1882–1950). In the period between 1925 and 1950, he was considered one of the leading German philosophers. His works—numerous, systematic, displaying his encyclopedic knowledge and covering a vast variety of subjects, from ontology and epistemology to ethics and aesthetics – quickly went into second, third, and in some cases even fourth editions. His 800-plus-page *Ethik* was translated into English five years after its publication, but that ended up being the only one of his major books rendered into this language.² In the second half of the twentieth- and at the beginning of the twenty-first century, Hartmann has been a neglected philosopher. He has been a forgotten giant.

I find this state of affairs puzzling. From the first years of my philosophy studies on, Hartmann has been one of my inspirations, one of my “teachers.” Every time I open his books, I learn something; his texts compel me to think afresh about a variety of philosophical issues. For this reason, with this introduction to his philosophy, I want to re-open the case for Hartmann. This book will focus on the questions concerning the nature and value of Hartmann's philosophy. More formally, the questions are:

1. What is at the core of Hartmann's philosophy?
2. What relevance, if any, does Hartmann's philosophy have for us in the twenty-first century?

There are two main obstacles for this project. The first is that philosophy itself is in such a state of disarray that it is not easy to say anymore either

¹ Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, *Why Arendt Matters* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006).

² Recently translated is Nicolai Hartmann, *Possibility and Actuality* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2013).

what philosophy is, or what role it is supposed to play in our age. The second obstacle is that Hartmann kept away from all the main currents of philosophy of his time; this makes it difficult to engage him in a dialogue that could help estimate the nature and value of his philosophy. I will briefly clarify both issues.

In a recent book, *Ideas That Matter: The Concepts That Shape the 21st Century*, A. C. Grayling, a well-respected Oxford philosopher, introduces our discipline in the following way: “Philosophy’ is derived from a Greek word literally meaning ‘love of wisdom’, but it is better and more accurately defined as ‘enquiry’ or ‘enquiry and reflection’, giving expressions to their widest scope to denote efforts to understand the world and human experience in it.”³ This introduction is so vague, so open-ended, so uninspiring, that, despite Grayling’s effort to make philosophy seem relevant, it only makes the reader wonder whether philosophy has any role to play in our lives: Can its concepts shape the twenty-first century? Do its ideas matter at all?

When insiders are so confused, we sometimes find deeper understanding of a certain discipline among its “amateurish” admirers. A famous historian, Will Durant, describes philosophy as “an attempt to coordinate the real in the light of the ideal.” He adds that metaphysics “is the study of the ‘ultimate reality’ of all things: of the real and final nature of ‘matter’ (ontology), of ‘mind’ (philosophical psychology), and of the interrelation of ‘mind’ and ‘matter’ in the process of perception and knowledge (epistemology).”⁴

The second part of Durant’s clarification is fairly standard. The first part, however, is interesting, even for Hartmann’s point of view: philosophy is “an attempt to coordinate the real in the light of the ideal.” This is of interest for several reasons. First, it puts no direct emphasis either on knowledge or on morals, as is customary nowadays. Durant’s characterization is also intriguing because it does not preclude an understanding of philosophy as love of wisdom: the wisdom of how to govern our lives in this troubled, disorienting age. Hartmann is always engaged in dialectical wrestling with philosophical tradition, and this original meaning of philosophy may be more important to him than it is for the vast majority of contemporary philosophers. Finally, Durant’s relating of the ideal and the real is significant for Hartmann because being and values are two major themes of his entire philosophical opus. Values are not derived from real being, but belong to

³ A. C. Grayling, *Ideas That Matter: The Concepts That Shape the 21st Century* (New York: Perseus Books, 2009), 263.

⁴ Will Durant, *The Story of Philosophy: The Lives and Opinions of Great Philosophers* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000), 3.

an independent realm that he calls “ideal being.” For Hartmann, as for Durant, the real—especially our lives—needs to be coordinated in the light of the ideal.

The problems of fitting Hartmann into a dialogue with other philosophers of his age begin with his insistence on the central and indispensable role of ontology for the overall philosophical project. Even a cursory list of his main publications shows us that he dedicated most of his career to developing a systematic ontology and articulating its relevance for other disciplines: *Grundzüge einer Metaphysik der Erkenntnis* (“Basic Elements of a Metaphysics of Knowledge,” 1921; forth edn, 1949), *Die Philosophie des deutschen Idealismus* (“The Philosophy of German Idealism,” Vol. I: 1923; Vol. II: 1929), *Ethik* (“Ethics,” 1925; 3rd edn, 1949), *Das Problem des geistigen Seins* (“The Problem of Spiritual Being,” 1933; 2nd edn, 1949), *Zur Grundlegung der Ontologie* (“On the Foundations of Ontology,” 1935; 3rd edn, 1948), *Möglichkeit und Wirklichkeit* (“Possibility and Actuality,” 1938; 2nd edn, 1948), *Der Aufbau der realen Welt* (“The Structure of the Real World,” 1940; 2nd edn, 1949), *Die Philosophie der Natur* (“Philosophy of Nature,” 1950), *Teleologisches Denken* (“Teleological Thinking,” 1951), and *Ästhetik* (“Aesthetics,” 1953).

Since ontology has been virtually nonexistent from the publication of Kant’s *Critique* (1781), why does Hartmann go back to ontology? Do we really need ontology to examine how the ideal can and should help us coordinate our lives? Why not approach the eternal and the ever-relevant question of how to live in the best possible way without considering the ontological question of being as being?

We can do it, as Arendt did, through political philosophy; after all, a human being is a political animal who cannot establish his/her humanity without social encounters with other human beings. Or we can attempt to understand our nature through the structure of the language we use, as Ludwig Wittgenstein, Ernst Cassirer, and Hans-Georg Gadamer (once Hartmann’s student) did. Or we can approach the question of humanity through religion, as for instance Hartmann’s contemporary Martin Buber did, because it is always tempting to determine our existence in comparison to what we are not and what we cannot become, that is, the divine being. Or we could attempt to reveal our role and place in reality by directly focusing on the human existence (*Dasein*) and its challenges, particularly anxiety with regard to death, as Martin Heidegger (once Hartmann’s colleague in Marburg) did.⁵

⁵ Arendt was a student in Marburg just when Hartmann was finishing his career there, but she was never Hartmann’s student. Gadamer was, but he quickly switched to Heidegger. After the initial mutual sympathy between Hartmann and Heidegger, the

Hartmann would have none of it. He approaches philosophy in the spirit of *philosophia perennis*, and shows hardly any interest in historicism, existentialism, hermeneutics, positivism, and pragmatism. This peculiar approach opened a chasm between Hartmann and his contemporaries and turned him away from the prevailing debates of his time. According to his student and friend, Robert Heiss,

Hartmann knew well there is a philosophy too which is the mere temporal phenomenon of an era and bound to its age. But to him such a temporal dowry was philosophy's perishable wrapping only. Its philosopher could only be an announcer for his time and through everything he says and formulates as truth appears a single and transitory experience only, which Hartmann considered not as immutable truth. Hartmann lived in the face of centuries. He was the contemplative who remains distant and remote from the incidents of a century, because he actually lives in the presence of centuries.⁶

Despite Heiss's enthusiastic proclamations, every philosophy emerges at a certain age. And although it must be partially affected by the spirit of time, philosophy does not have to be blinded by it. On the Russian front during World War I, Hartmann conceived of a complex system of ontology, focusing on the problem of being as being. Toward the end of the war, he began writing his *Ethics*, searching for the immutable essences of moral values. In the besieged and virtually destroyed Berlin of 1945, he wrote his monumental *Aesthetics* in which he pondered the true nature of the beautiful and the sublime.

Hartmann was indeed focused on eternal aspects of philosophical problems. Yet he did not and could not ignore the differences in the interpretations of these problems, as they were affected by historical events and the epochs in which they emerged. Nor was he like Roden's "Thinker," absorbed in his own thoughts and oblivious to the historical tides of his own times. Hartmann did live in his own age and his philosophical thinking was acutely aware of the different temporally conditioned approaches to

personal relation cooled off and their professional opposition intensified as well. For more details, see Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Philosophical Apprenticeships*, trans. R. R. Sullivan (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985), 12–15 and *passim*. See also Wolfgang Harich: *Nicolai Hartmann—Leben, Werk, Wirkung*, ed. Martin Morgenstern (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2000).

⁶ Robert Heiss, "Nicolai Hartmann: A Personal Sketch," *Personalist*, 42:1961, 482–3. Following Heiss and Hartmann, throughout the manuscript, I use "he" and "man" generically, that is, to refer to a human being and not to one gender only. The choice is based purely on the simplicity of this language, as opposed to the cumbersome "he or she" and "his/her" expressions.

philosophy and its central problems.⁷ Arendt famously claimed that it is “not ideas but events [that] change the world.”⁸ Hartmann did not think that we can understand the events we experience without previously held ideas, or that ideas are endorsed in order to change the world.

In light of such obstacles and complexities, how can we discern the true nature and relevance of Hartmann’s philosophy?

In this book, I will use three “measuring sticks,” moving from the most general toward the most specific. First, I will use some help from Karl Jaspers. In the Introduction to his monumental book, *The Great Philosophers*, he divides all major philosophers into three main groups: (1) the “pragmatic individuals” (such as Buddha, Confucius, Socrates and Jesus); (2) the great thinkers at the borders of philosophy and other realms of human experience (e.g., Goethe, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy); and (3) the great philosophical thinkers. Jaspers then divides this third group into several subcategories: (3.1) the seminal thinkers, whose ideas have continued to bear fruit (Plato, St Augustine, Kant); (3.2) the intellectual visionaries and original metaphysicians (Parmenides, Heraclitus, Plotinus, Spinoza); (3.3) the “great disturbers,” regardless of whether they were primarily the “probing negators” (Abelard, Descartes, Hume), or the “radical awakeners” (Pascal, Lessing, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche); and (3.4) the “creative orderers,” whose great systems are the culmination of long developments (Aristotle, Aquinas, Hegel).⁹

If Hartmann belongs to the Pantheon of great philosophical thinkers, at the end of this treatise we would be able to determine into which group he should be classified.

Second, the evaluation of Hartmann’s philosophy can also be approached in a more thematic way. He clearly stands within the Western philosophical tradition and inherits some of its main concerns, problems, and assumptions. This tradition, though it has been long and complex, can perhaps be summed up by its four central “pillars”:

1. *The principle of order*, which holds that everything that exists is ordered and structured.
2. *The principle of knowability*, which asserts that everything that has structure and order is knowable.

⁷ See, for instance, Hartmann’s article, “German Philosophy in the Last Ten Years,” which he wrote as President of the German Philosophical Association; *MIND* 58:1949, 413–33.

⁸ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 273.

⁹ Karl Jaspers, *The Great Philosophers: The Foundations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Ralph Mannheim (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1962), 7.

3. *The principle of self-mastery*, which affirms that ethical development and virtuous behavior require self-discipline and self-restraint.
4. *The principle of reciprocity* between virtuous behavior and happiness, which postulates that those who master their own passions and behave virtuously will be rewarded, while those who do not will be punished.¹⁰

These principles can be rephrased in terms of the idea of harmony, with which they are intimately associated. We could then express their meanings as follows. The first principle asserts harmony within *being* itself. The second postulates harmony between *being and the mind*. The third talks about establishing harmony within *human beings*. The fourth expresses a conviction that human *behavior and events* in the world are harmoniously arranged (roughly on the model of action and to it proportionate reaction).

How does Hartmann respond to these four fundamental principles? Would he accept them? Modify them? Reject them?

Thirdly, Hartmann's philosophy can be approached in an even more focused way. For example, we can take seriously an ancient belief that every philosopher truly develops only one idea. This deeply rooted belief implies that a philosopher is born of a single question, the question that he must find a way to answer. If this is so, the ultimate concern of our inquiry into the nature and value of Hartmann's philosophical legacy becomes much clearer: What is this one question in Hartmann's case? What is his single central philosophical idea?

¹⁰ My reconstruction of these assumptions is based on Richard Tarnas's book, *The Passion of the Western Mind: Understanding the Ideas That Have Shaped Our World View* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1993).

Part I

Being

“Being itself is disharmonious, and conflict is the form of its being.”

Hartmann

Philosophical Method

For Plato and Aristotle, philosophy begins with wonder (*θαύμα*). Arendt understands *θαύμα* in terms of a “shocked wonder” at the miracle of being, which could leave us speechless because the actual content of what is observed is untranslatable into words. It is precisely this “shocked wonder” that eventually leads Plato toward the beholding of Ideas. While Aristotle speaks about the beginning of philosophy in virtually the same terms as Plato, his emphasis is different than that of his teacher. For Aristotle, “the actual impulse to philosophize lies in the desire ‘to escape ignorance.’”¹

The modern spirit of doubt stands in striking contrast to the ancient spirit of wonder. All modern philosophy, maintains Arendt, consists in the ramifications of Descartes’ radical doubt. Dudley Young points out another important difference between the ancient and modern attitudes, the one dealing with the will-to-power. To wonder at the world involves not only attentiveness and awe, but also the intention to keep what is wonder-ful safe from the forces of ignorance that would soil and obscure it. According to Young, “Philosophy originates not in the will-to-power but in wonder, which is to say that the world we wish to understand calls us in the first instance to arrest our movements, put down our tools, and be properly astonished by its ‘that-ness’ . . . before we set to work analyzing its ‘what-ness.’”²

Hartmann would approve of the remarks by both Arendt and Young. He also subscribes to the ancient view that philosophy begins with wonder and argues that there is no other natural entrance path to philosophy. The ancient philosophers wondered at the beauty and complexity of the *κόσμος*, of the universe which they experienced as a living being. Philosophy begins with wonder, and it consists in the thoughtful exploration of the beauty and the complexity of the universe. For Hartmann, philosophy is the *analysis of wonder*.

¹ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 302, note 67. See also Arendt, *The Life of the Mind* (San Diego, CA: Harcourt, 1978), 141–51.

² Dudley Young, *Origins of the Sacred* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1991), 270.

Hartmann accounts for different stages of philosophical thinking by combining phenomenology and aporetics. Philosophy is a conceptual analysis of *φαινόμενα*—not of words, not of concepts, not of ideas, but of what appears to us, of what is given to us. While we have to start with phenomena, we must reach toward that which appears in and through phenomena. Knowledge is not of phenomena, not of things as they appear. Knowledge is of things as they are.

This is why Husserl uses the term “phenomenology” to issue a call: “*Zurück zu den Sachen*” —“return to the things themselves.” The motive for this call is a preoccupation of modern philosophers not so much with the wonders of the universe, but with the wonders of the mind cognizing this universe. Instead of focusing on things we observe, we concentrate on mental processes by means of which we observe and analyze those things. What does not even penetrate the consciousness of a normal observer—to observe how he observes, to be conscious of his own consciousness—becomes a chief concern of modern philosophy. This explains the shift in philosophy not only from ontology to epistemology, but also toward the philosophy of mind, psychology, and logic. It is also the motivation behind works such as Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*—the study of forms of consciousness.

Hartmann is sometimes considered a phenomenologist and his work is even called the culminating point of the phenomenological movement.³ But he is a phenomenologist only in so far as he supported Husserl’s respect for a careful intuitive observation of reality and his enthusiasm to return to things themselves. For Hartmann, this is more than a mere methodological point:

A narrowing of the field of vision is the inveterate vice of philosophy. The defect in all “isms” —whether rationalism, empiricism, sensualism, materialism, psychologism or logicism—is narrowness in the mapping out of the problem. Everywhere the manifoldness of the phenomena is misjudged and varieties are erroneously treated as all alike.⁴

Philosophy begins with wonder and leads to problems and aporias (*ἀπορίαι*). Even careful and open-minded observations of phenomena

³ See Michael Landmann, “Nicolai Hartmann and Phenomenology,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 3:1942/3, 393–423, especially 396 and 422.

⁴ Nicolai Hartmann, *Ethik*, trans. Stanton Coit (New York: Macmillan, 1932) in three volumes. Coit’s translations was recently modified by A. M. Kinneging and republished by Transaction Publishers (New Brunswick, NJ): Vol. I: *Moral Phenomena*, 2002; Vol. II: *Moral Values*, 2003; Vol. III. *Moral Freedom*, 2004). I will give references to the chapter and section of the German edition, and then in the brackets to the volume and page number of the English translation; in this particular case, ch. 7a [I, 106].

lead to aporias, which are like knots in wood. They are not made by us, nor do they emerge because of our ignorance, lack of depth, or because we approach problems from the wrong angle. The knots are in the wood itself, in the grains of the world that we encounter. They emerge as the tree of being grows. We encounter them regardless of our philosophical or historical perspective—regardless of whether we look at the tree of being from the top or bottom, from the left or right.

These knots, those problems and aporias, create a philosophical challenge. They present a challenge because it is difficult to cut a knot through the middle, no matter how hard we try or how skillful we are. Often we must acknowledge these knots and leave them as they are. Only in that sense does philosophy become theoretical (*θεωρία*)—not as a definitive or comprehensive solution of certain problems, and even less as a complete theoretical system. Philosophy is (only) a *way* of looking and considering, of grasping and contemplating the complexities of the world—as much and as carefully as that is possible.⁵

Although practiced by Socrates and Plato, Hartmann credits Aristotle for developing aporetics. The virtue of Aristotle's forgotten procedure consists in approaching philosophical problems by analyzing the given facts and trying to uncover the inner structure of the problems in question. Grasping the inner structure of philosophical problems allows us to ignore their accidental features and historical residues. It also enables us to understand what is ceaselessly puzzling in these problems. Metaphysical problems are nothing but eternal puzzles that the world poses to us.

Aristotle relates aporias to *δισπορία*, the explorations of various routes or ways. This is why Hartmann translates the Greek word “*aporia*” as *Weglösigkeit*: encountering obstacles on our way and getting lost *en route*. These obstacles may result from our ignorance and confusion. They also, and no less importantly, emerge from the path, from reality itself: “being itself is disharmonious, and conflict is the form of being.”⁶

⁵ Taken in this sense, in *Grundzüge einer Metaphysik der Erkenntnis*, forth edn (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1949), ch. 11, 125, Hartmann seems to suggest the following three-stage approach: phenomena, problems (aporias), and theory. Roberto Poli maintains that this is Hartmann's methodological approach; see his article on Hartmann in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (<http://plato.stanford.edu/entires/nicolai-hartmann>).

⁶ Nicolai Hartmann, “Wie ist kritische Ontologie überhaupt möglich?”, in E. Cassirer (ed.), *Festschrift für Paul Natorp* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1924), 124–77; reprinted in Nicolai Hartmann, *Kleinere Schriften*, Vol. 3 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1958), 268–313, quoted from page 311. Translated by Keith Peterson as “How is Critical Ontology Possible?” *Axiomates* 22: 2012, 315–54. See also Nicolai Hartmann, *Neue Wege der Ontologie*, trans. Reinhard C. Kuhn as *New Ways of Ontology* and first published in English by Henry Regenery Company (Chicago, in 1953), and recently reissued by Transaction Publishers (New Brunswick, NJ, 2012). I will give references by first citing

The aporia of cognition is one eternally puzzling philosophical problem. An analysis of basic phenomena leads to this aporia. Phenomena reveal that a subject and an object of cognition transcend each other, yet the act of cognition consists in overcoming their gap. The subject and the object stand against each other, separated from one another, and their ontological status is by no means determined by their cognitive relation. This object is indifferent toward any subject, that is, toward being known by any subject. And even the subject is not limited to this relation, for cognition is only one of the possible ways in which any subject relates to the world. Nevertheless, as subjects and objects of cognition, there is an important relation between them. The aporia of cognition reveals the paradoxical nature of this relation: Is the cognitive relation of the subject and the object something accidental and inessential to their separate existences, or does it abdicate their transcendence? Hartmann devotes his first major philosophical work, *Basic Elements of a Metaphysics of Knowledge*, to this aporia.

Hartmann perceives the most distinctive virtue of Aristotle's aporetics as "discussing problems without trying to solve them at any cost."⁷ This is not an innocent remark, for Hartmann believes that the strictly metaphysical aspects of philosophical problems are beyond the limits of the rationally resolvable. They are insolvable not because of a lack of the right method, or our ignorance, or, more generally, some deficiency of the cognitive subject. Rather, they are unsolvable because there is something conflicting and irreconcilable in the very nature of being. This metaphysical aspect of philosophical problems is unavoidable, and thus the goal of philosophy cannot be to solve its problems "no matter what." The aporetic method does not look "longingly for results."⁸ Its goal must instead be to establish "the minimum of metaphysics necessary for the proper consideration of philosophical problems."⁹

the chapter from which the quote is taken (which is the same for the original German and the English translation), and then by giving a page number of the Transaction edition; in this particular case, ch. VI, 67–73.

⁷ Nicolai Hartmann, *Grundzüge einer Metaphysik der Erkenntnis*, Introduction, 8. In *Ethik*, ch. 75a [III, 138], Hartmann claims: "No philosophy 'solves' metaphysical problems, it can only deal with them; and how far it can succeed in so doing must always remain doubtful." As an illustration of this approach, see ch. 84 [III, 251–5] of *Ethik*.

⁸ Nicolai Hartmann, "Diesseits von Idealismus and Realismus," *Kant-Studien* 29:1924, 161.

⁹ Hartmann, *Grundzüge einer Metaphysik der Erkenntnis*, Introduction, 8. For further discussion, see Anton Schlittmaier, "Nicolai Hartmann's Aporetics and Its Place in the History of Philosophy," in R. Poli, C. Scognamiglio, and F. Tremblay (eds), *The Philosophy of Nicolai Hartmann*, (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2011), 33–52.

Aristotle distances himself from Socrates, who claims that the only knowledge that he has is that of his ignorance. Yet even Aristotle admits that the resolutions of the aporias we face may take a variety of forms: not only the positing of the most likely hypothesis, which he considers to be the distinguishing feature of the method of analysis, but also of allowing the existence of a reasonable contradiction, which is the subject matter of dialectic.

To emphasize the same point, in his writings after *Basic Elements of a Metaphysics of Knowledge*, Hartmann speaks more often about antinomies than about aporias. In this sense, he follows Kant, who argues that speculative metaphysics leads to the contrasting, equally supportable claims that cannot be resolved by rational means (alone). Kant initially accepts the existence of four antinomies of pure reason, but in the subsequent *Critiques* (*Critique of Practical Reason* and *Critique of Judgment*), he discovers new antinomies in other realms of philosophical thinking as well. According to Hartmann, there are metaphysical aporias and antinomies in every aspect of being, in every facet of human experience.

Can these aporias and antinomies ever be resolved? Is the task of philosophy to lead us to the definitive solutions to such metaphysical problems?

Hartmann does not think so. In this context, it may be important to introduce a few of his thoughts on dialectic. Like a Socratic dialogue, dialectic deals with differing, frequently opposing views. Socrates has no problem with his dialogues ending in aporias, as long as they lead his interlocutors to realize the unsoundness of their own previously held views and their ignorance with regard to some important ethical issues. Plato and Aristotle turn dialectic into a positive method, a method by means of which we come to the most general ideas from most specific cases. Like Socrates, Kant retorts to the negative aspect of dialectic, the dialectic as the “logic of illusion,” a way of curbing the unfounded pretensions of speculative reason. For Hegel, dialectic once again becomes a positive method by which a thesis and its antithesis are resolved into a higher synthesis.

Hartmann resists this “textbook” interpretation of Hegel’s dialectical method. He does not hide his high, almost reverential opinion about this method:

Under all circumstances one will not be able to conceal that there is something opaque, unclarified and enigmatic in dialectic. There were in all ages only very few who mastered it, isolated ones indeed. In antiquity there were about three or four speculative thinkers; in the modern period definitely not more—at least of those who have

created with it something definite. Obviously there is a characteristic dialectical giftedness which permits development, but does not result from training. It is then a special, original, independent gift of inner vision and indeed of a synoptic grasping, which, advancing along the coherent data, sees them at once from various aspects again and again and notices them iridescent in their contradictions but at the same time grasps the subjection of the contrasts to the thing itself. It is remarkable that those with dialectic talent do not reveal the mystery of dialectics; they have the method and apply it well, but they cannot describe how they do it. Evidently they themselves do not know it. It is comparable to the creation of the artist. The artist does not know the law he follows when he creates. But he creates in conformity to it. Genius and the congenial both follow the law blindly, unfailingly, as in somnambulism.¹⁰

Hartmann frequently claims that philosophy is one of the sciences. He uses the word “analysis” in a related way, suggesting that our exploration of a certain subject has to be as systematic and rigorous as possible. Such an approach does not tell the whole story of his understanding of philosophy and its method. Philosophical analysis is initiated by the careful grasping of the phenomena and stands opposed to all aprioristic deductivism, which burdened even Hegel’s dialectic. Such careful grasping, followed by a step-by-step analysis, with the subtle, almost infinite shading of the details, as we know especially from Hartmann’s ethical and aesthetic writings, is neither widely nor sufficiently developed among philosophers.

Although such a step-by-step analysis is both difficult and rare, Hartmann is aware that dialectic poses even greater challenges.¹¹ Analysis can take us far in our efforts to understand the problems as much as possible, yet every analysis has its limitations, and they are most clearly revealed when we come to the ultimate questions, or the questions of principles. Despite all the artificial constructions in his *Logic*, it is to Hegel’s great merit that he recognizes that, when we deal with fundamental questions of principle, our analysis comes to an end and becomes impotent. Every time we deal with these fundamental questions, we encounter an antinomy. And antinomies

¹⁰ Nicolai Hartmann, *Die Philosophie des deutschen Idealismus* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1974), Vol. 2, Part III, ch. 2, 378. See Nicolai Hartmann, *Ästhetik* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1966), ch. 41d, 466, for the connection between dialectic and aesthetic experience.

¹¹ See Hartmann, “Wie ist kritische Ontologie überhaupt möglich?” especially 302–31; and Nicolai Hartmann, *Der Aufbau der realen Welt*, 3rd edn (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1964), ch. 17, 149–56.

can be dealt with only through dialectical thinking. In Hartmann's view, it is precisely the task of dialectic to track down concealed antinomical elements wherever they exist.

The fact that there were only a few masters of dialectic in the entire history of Western philosophy suggests to Hartmann that dialectic is more like a gift than a method that can be trained. Philosophical thinking relies on analysis, on a rational exploration of all data and knowledge available to us, from common sense to scientific knowledge. Yet philosophy ends in dialectical thinking, which does not shun oppositions, contradictions, or even insoluble problems. On the contrary, it thrives in them, which is why sometimes dialectical thinking is called the "logic of paradoxes."

If dialectic, as the crown of philosophical thinking, cannot be fully articulated and trained, if it makes a philosopher more like an artist and a somnambulist than like a scientist, then it will certainly have an impact on how philosophy is understood and practiced. Philosophy is not a quest for certainty. It is not a product but a project. Despite its systematic and rigorous approach, philosophy does not prove anything. It probes.

Being as Being

Aristotle's most famous book, *Metaphysics*, was not named that way by him. He left no title at all, and its editors placed it behind his works on *Physics*. Thus the name *Metaphysics*: behind (or above, or beyond) physics. It is generally accepted that this title, accidental as it is, is accurate. Hartmann disagrees. He believes that the book should be named "Ontology" since it deals with ontological problems. One exception is book XII, which focuses on metaphysical issues in the narrow sense.

Hartmann holds that ontological problems are a subset of metaphysical problems concerning the ultimate nature and structure of being (*τὸ ὄν*, *Sein*). Unlike the majority of our metaphysical problems, he argues that ontological problems are most solvable. Yet, we cannot solve them if we follow the ways of traditional ontology:

The old theory of being is based upon the thesis that the universal, crystallized in the *essentia* as substantial form and comprehensible as concept, is the determining and formative core of things. . . . The extreme representatives of this doctrine even assigned true reality to the universal essences alone, thereby disparaging the world of time and [individual] things.¹

The essence of things can be captured by concepts and definitions—or at least that was the expectation of the old ontology. Existence itself, however, is far more slippery. Among other things, it requires contact with and careful observation of the concrete being under consideration. This is where phenomenology replaces the old deductive ontology.

¹ Hartmann, *Neue Wege der Ontologie*, ch. I, 29–30. Etienne Gilson expresses it in a way closer to our common sense understanding: "Human reason feels at home in a world of things whose essences and laws it can grasp and define in terms of concepts; but shy and ill at ease in a world of existences, because to exist is an act, not a thing"; *God and Philosophy*, 2nd edn (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), 67.

Hartmann argues that this type of deductive ontology is impossible for us. The time of ontological systems—indeed, of all grandiose philosophical constructions—is over. After Christian Wolff’s monumental effort to build the ultimate ontological system, ontology has been neglected; it has fallen into centuries-long sleep. Yet ontological problems are not fabricated problems that can simply be dismissed. Hartmann’s task is to revitalize the sleeping beauty, to open “new ways of ontology.” Ontology itself, with its sets of traditional problems, is as indispensable as ever.²

Why, exactly, do we need ontology? Why should not ontological problems, understood as the perennial problems that deal with the structure of being as being, be dismissed?

Hartmann counters that all fundamental metaphysical questions are ontological in nature. Ontological views are present in the background of most other questions, including scientific ones; science cannot determine what is matter, force, energy, space, time, *et cetera*. Science must accept certain ontological interpretation of these categories. This is one important way ontology is essential for our overall understanding of reality and our place and role within it. In the second and the third parts of this book we will consider the significance of ontology for ethics, aesthetics, and our understanding of personality.

I am emphasizing this point because Hartmann’s entire philosophical opus depends on his view that ontology is an endeavor that has a grounding function for other intellectual disciplines. If he is right, the ontological views have a domino effect on the rest of our beliefs. To make this clearer, Hartmann reminds us that it makes a difference whether, for instance, we agree with Plato that the particular is less real and derivative of the universal, or, like Aristotle, turn it upside down. It makes an even greater difference whether we concur with ancient and scholastic philosophers that being and good are intimately connected, or assert, together with modern philosophers, that this is not so, and that cosmology and ethics have nothing in common. This kind of denial is decisive for our understanding of ethics in terms of autonomy, rather than as moral norms revealed to us by some transcendent deity.

We will decide later whether ontology has indeed such a grounding role in our thinking. Hartmann opens his *Foundations of Ontology* in a more

² Nicolai Hartmann, *Zur Grundlegung der Ontologie*, forth edn (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1965), xi. For Hartmann’s masterful summary review of the history of ontological thought, see Chapters 5–10 of this work. His review also includes a harsh criticism of Heidegger.

restricted manner, focusing on the simplest and most direct ontological problem of being as being:

Ontology begins with a decisive statement of openness regarding the fundamental metaphysical questions, with an attitude that stands in opposition to “philosophical” perspectives and systems. From the point of view of ontology, it is not at all important, in terms of posing the question, whether or not there is such a thing as a “ground” of the world, whether or not this ground has an intelligible form, or even whether or not the construction of the world has some meaningful end toward which its whole process is oriented. The character of being as such is not significantly altered by the answers to such questions. These distinctions only come into play when considering broader aspects of differentiation. Clearly, decisive consequences for metaphysics arise from the initial handling of the question of being. But this understanding cannot be taken the other way around. We cannot know anything about the world or its “ground” before we get into the question of being. Neither can theories regarding the objects of being be verified. For, by its very essence, the problem of being would appear to be rooted in such questions. It inheres in phenomena, not in hypotheses.³

Philosophers (and scientists) have always searched for the ultimate elements of reality. They have searched for them in the sense in which the roots of the tree of knowledge represent the ultimate issues in Descartes, or in the way God, immortality, and freedom signify the ultimate concerns in Kant’s metaphysics. The beginning and the end of the paragraph quoted above warn not to approach the question of being as being in terms of hypothesis and pre-formed theories. Also, it warns not to expect that there must be some ultimate or unconditioned element or substance holding together the entire edifice of being. This expectation has an unfortunate ripple effect in all directions and impacts how we treat many other issues. We must approach the central ontological question with an open mind, by paying close attention to phenomena. According to cognitive phenomena, being is a *neutral* category. As Hartmann repeatedly insists, such an approach will allow us a point of departure from “*this side of idealism and realism*,” from a natural standpoint, not yet “infected” by philosophical theories and their prejudices.

³ Hartmann, *Zur Grundlegung der Ontologie*, ch. 1a, 36.

Hartmann's open-minded approach to given phenomena leads him to hold on to natural realism. Taken as such, this is a pre-philosophical and pre-theoretical view that being is what it is. Being has the structure that it does, regardless of what anyone may think or know about it, of whether the world as a whole is rational or not, purposive or not, cognizable or not. This natural realism, which postulates the independence and indifference of being toward any subject, its interests, expectations, or cognitive standpoint, is common ground between naïve and scientific cognition. In Hartmann's words, "as a matter of principle, ontology tracks only the problem and considers only that which is demanded by the problem. It moves away from the natural standpoint as little as possible, and it preserves its point of view as far as it is valid."⁴

Ontological analysis of being treats Aristotle's question of being as being as the initial question of ontology and this is important for several reasons. One of the most important messages of Hartmann's entire opus deals with the fullness and richness of being. He intends to revive philosophy, so that it can adapt to the reality of the world in its richness. Hartmann's intention need not be immediately obvious, for the question of being as being amounts to approaching being in its *bareness*. We have to ponder what it means to be, simply to exist: not as this or that kind of thing, nor necessarily as a thing, but simply to be. Think about it: in order to come to the richness and fullness of being, we need to start from its sheer existence.

Although this question of being as being may appear simple, it is actually extremely difficult to think through. The history of philosophy is testimony to the fact that we often rush to classify being in terms of some of its characteristics, determinations or predicates, rather than keeping it open, preserving it in its bareness, and focusing on it in its generality and indeterminacy. A cardinal sin of traditional ontology is its perpetual attempts to define being through its various contents and manifestations. Regardless of whether this is done in terms of substance, essence, causality, matter, form, immovable, unchangeable, indivisible, individual, whole, or any other way, Hartmann finds this project irreparably flawed, and for the same reason. All these concepts limit themselves to individual categories of being. They "get" only one side of being and miss being as being. They forget that the problem of being as being deals not only with the inorganic world, but with a living organism, as well as with the psychic and spiritual forms of life.

Naivety and common sense limit being to things. But being belongs equally to processes, relations, and properties of things. Being belongs

⁴ Hartmann, *Grundzüge einer Metaphysik der Erkenntnis*, ch. 23, 185.

to what is changing and becoming, as well as to that which is enduring or permanent. It does not distinguish between what appears and what is hidden, or what can be cognized and what will never be so. Being belongs to what is one, as much as it belongs to what is many, to parts or to totality; to what is individual as to what is universal. What is evil is no less real than what is good; what is ugly has its being no less than what is beautiful or sublime. As Hartmann sums it up: “The most insignificant grain of dust in the universe is no less being than the universe itself.”⁵

Hartmann is firmly convinced that being—simply being as being—cannot be defined. Being is the most general category we can think and ask about. There is nothing else “behind it” to which it can be further reduced, or in terms of which it can be defined. In this regard, there is no difference between being (as the most general ontological category), the good (as the most general ethical category), and the beautiful (as the most general aesthetic category). The most general categories are always indefinable and thus partially irrational.

Although being as being has a grounding function, although it serves as the root for all specific manifestations of being, Hartmann rejects linear hierarchies of being. We can attempt to grasp some aspects of the relations of being as being toward the individual beings. Perhaps we even have an intellectual obligation to clarify them as much as possible. Much about them will, however, remain unknown forever. With the rest of our scientific and philosophical efforts, ontology will never become a closed system, a complete body of knowledge. What little *can* be known about being will, nevertheless, turn out to be of enormous significance.

⁵ Hartmann, *Zur Grundlegung der Ontologie*, ch. 7e, 66.

Modifications of Being

Although being is not definable, this does not imply that it is indeterminable. Being can be determined indirectly, through its various manifestations. Hartmann bases his new ontology on three kinds of ontological manifestations: (i) *modes* (or *modalities*) of being, which refer to various kinds of modalities; (ii) *moments* of being, which deal with the relationship of *Dasein* (that something is existent and present) and *Sosein* (how it is; its being in a certain way); and (iii) *ways* of being, which concern the relationship between the real and the ideal.

The structure of being can be conceived of in terms of the relation of modes that govern it, that is, in terms of “inter-modal relations.” The modalities do not pertain to what being is, its content, but to the mode in which it exists. These possible modes divide into absolute modalities (reality and unreality) and relative modalities (possibility, impossibility, necessity). We can further distinguish each of these relative modes by their sub-modes. For example, there is not only logical necessity, but also epistemological and real necessity. There is furthermore a counter-modality to necessity, namely contingency.

In order to understand being as being, ontology must begin with an examination of possibility and actuality. For centuries this was considered the fundamental problem of ontology. New ontology must readdress this issue, because old ontology confuses actuality (*Wirklichkeit*, as opposed to possibility) and reality (*Realität*, as opposed to ideality [*Idealität*])—a mode of being versus a way of being. Old ontology also does not carefully distinguish between a moment of being and a mode of being: what exists and what is real. Hartmann points out that something can exist but not necessarily as a real being; it can also exist as an ideal being.

Old ontology postulates, regarding the relationship of potentiality and actuality, that everything real is a realization of a pre-existing potentiality (or disposition). In its most teleological turn, old ontology also assumes that all being is destined to become what it is by disposition, regardless of whether that destiny is regulated by the will of God, or by mechanical causation.

Hartmann strongly opposes this teleological orientation of old ontology. In fact, he finds that the persistence of teleological thinking in modern philosophy is one of the main reasons for the neglect of ontology; if the world is going in a certain direction, if it is guided by an “invisible hand” toward its predestined goal, why bother examining being as being? Why not, instead, study the proclaimed *τέλος* and the processes leading to its realization?

To counter this teleological mirage, Hartmann introduces the distinction between an “essential possibility” of old ontology (as something destined to be realized) and a “real possibility” (the realization of which depends on whether all of its necessary conditions are satisfied). In real being, or “actual reality,” only that whose conditions are all real is possible. Hartmann thus eliminates the need for a teleological conception of a divine being, as well as a purely mechanical determinism of the world. He refuses to postulate in advance any pre-determination of the world. Instead, he carries on with phenomenological method, according to which the world is an open structure. It can, but need not, be determined. Or it can be partially determined and partially undetermined. For example, a student exceptionally gifted in philosophy may, but also may not, go on to graduate school and become a professional philosopher. Whether or not that happens depends on far more than the student’s gifts and predispositions. It may depend on the encouragement (or lack thereof) by the student’s professors, or pressure by the parents placed on the student to pursue a certain other path, as well as other factors.

Hartmann’s central position in regard to the modalities of being is this: “actual reality must in every case be considered to be the complex result of a far-flung context of determinants.”¹ As the principle of sufficient reason formulates, if any of the conditions is missing, something becomes really impossible. In contrast, if the conditions are all fulfilled, something must happen necessarily. Thus, all that is really possible is likewise real and necessary, and all that is “negatively” possible is also unreal and impossible. “Actuality in the narrow and only true sense is only the real actuality.”²

Hartmann’s consideration of the modalities of being leads to a new formulation and justification of the principle of sufficient reason. Also, it brings him to a new characterization of the nature of becoming, obligation, and the puzzling ontological status of aesthetic objects (to which we will return in Part II).

¹ Hartmann, *Neue Wege der Ontologie*, ch. III, 46.

² Nicolai Hartmann, *Möglichkeit und Wirklichkeit*, 2nd edn (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1949), 57. For further discussion, see Rafael Hüntelmann, *Möglich ist nur das Wirkliche: Nicolai Hartmanns Modalontologie des realen Sein* (Dettelbach: Röhl, 2000).

The discussion of the moments of being, in terms of *Dasein* and *Sosein*, represents one of the finest examples of Hartmann's novel approach to ontology.³ His clarification of this fundamental ontological distinction helps us see how dialectical thinking may lead to a fruitful chain of reasoning, or—when in the “wrong” hands—to ever greater confusion regarding the nature of the real. He believes that a misunderstanding of the complex relation of *Dasein* and *Sosein* is responsible for countless mistakes throughout the history of Western philosophy.

Like some other German expressions, the terms *Dasein* and *Sosein* do not have elegant English translations. *Dasein* literally means that something, some being, is present. It refers to the fact *that* something is. *Sosein*, by contrast, points toward *what* it is. The history of ontology is full of erroneous convictions that the difference between *Dasein* and *Sosein* corresponds to the distinction between existence and essence. Hartmann maintains to the contrary that *Sosein* is not identical to essence; it involves essential as well as nonessential characteristics of what is. Further, he denies that existence and essence can be ontologically separated: existence is also essence, and essence is also existence.⁴ How can that be possible?

Dasein and *Sosein* stand in opposition to each other as two distinguishable moments of being. Nevertheless, they are both needed as the characterizations of one and the same being. As Hartmann succinctly states, “There is no *Sosein* without *Dasein* and no *Dasein* without *Sosein*.”⁵ The two terms can be conceptually differentiated, but *Dasein* and *Sosein* cannot be ontologically separated. Despite being deeply interwoven, there is no direct and tautological identity between *Dasein* and *Sosein*, even in the same thing. The relation is rather dialectical, which, for Hartmann, means that the *Dasein* of a certain A is at the same time the *Sosein* of a certain B, and the *Sosein* of that existent B is at the same time the *Dasein* of some C. For instance, the *Dasein* of a tree is the *Sosein* of a forest, for without the tree the forest would not be the same. Further, the *Dasein* of the forest is the *Sosein* of, say, a landscape; the *Dasein* of the landscape is the *Sosein* of the earth, and so on. At the end of the chain, we come to the

³ Otto Samuel translates *Dasein* and *Sosein* as “Hereness” and “Suchness”; Otto Samuel, *A Foundation of Ontology: A Critical Analysis of Nicolai Hartmann* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1953), 47–8. It is also possible to translate these terms as “that-ness” and “what-ness.” For Heidegger, *Dasein* refers to a manner of Being, “being-in-the-world,” which reveals an incorrigible *finitude* in the very manner of being. By contrast, Hartmann thinks of being in terms of the complementary categorial pair: finite—infinite.

⁴ Hartmann, *Zur Grundlegung der Ontologie*, ch. 19a, 123–4.

⁵ Hartmann, *Zur Grundlegung der Ontologie*, ch. 18a, 118.

last member, the universe as a whole, about which we can only say that it is (*Dasein*) but not how it is (*Sosein*).⁶

Here we see the difference of Hartmann's treatment in comparison to the traditional philosophers. Without a proper appreciation of the *Dasein*—*Sosein* distinction, the traditional philosophers perpetually tried to determine the *Sosein* of the world as a whole by analogy to an individual thing (*res*). They also attempted to elevate the *Dasein* of the last link into some kind of higher (absolute, unconditional, etc.) being. No such hierarchies of being are justified. What we must take away from this distinction of *Dasein* and *Sosein* is that more than mere existence belongs to the real, and that there is existence even outside of the real. This directs us toward Hartmann's discussion of the real and ideal being, which has turned out to be the most controversial of the three modifications of being he discusses. Since it is also most important for all other parts of his philosophical project, we will give it due attention.

It is obvious that there are real beings. They are phenomenologically given to us as individual, unique, and temporally located. Many real beings are also located in space (for instance inanimate objects), but not all of them are. But, why believe that there is any other kind of being? Why believe that there is any sphere of ideal being or, as Hartmann sometimes also calls it, the ideal world? This is the central aporia of ideal being.

In long, and often futile, discussions over the nature of universals, ideal being has been relegated either into things, concepts, or, in some cases, the transcendent mind of God. Hartmann admits that there is no "natural" consciousness of ideal being. Its existence is hidden, as it were, in the background of real being. While real being imposes itself on us, ideal being never does. This is why ideal being is so often denied, neglected, or simply overlooked.

The first and most convincing indication that ideal being exists was found in mathematics. From Plato's belief in the significance of geometry to Galileo's dictum that "the Book of Nature is written in mathematical language," there has long been a conviction that mathematical principles are not just concepts and ideas. They exist not as thoughts but as entities. Besides mathematical principles, there are also logical principles. Hartmann calls mathematical and logical principles "formal essences," in order to distinguish them from values, which (following Max Scheler) he considers as "material essences."

Ideal being manifests itself through multiple connections with real being. To a significant degree, the world of real things obeys mathematical

⁶ Hartmann, *Zur Grundlegung der Ontologie*, ch. 19d, 128–9.

and logical principles; ideal values find their realization in this world. We can hardly understand what human beings are, or what it means to have a personality, without taking into account the various aspects of ideal being.

Hartmann holds that we can discover the structural properties of ideal being even without their actualization in real being. Ideal being is open for insight by a priori cognition. We can recognize ideal being a priori because it is universal, nontemporal, and unchanging. From this point of view, it appears that ideal being has a mode of existence independent of real being; just as real being is indifferent to being cognized, ideal being is indifferent to being actualized. This realization seduces Plato to consider ideal being as a higher form of being and ontologically superior to real being.

Plato goes too far. He overlooks the double aspect of the relationship of real and ideal beings. Ontologically speaking, real beings have superiority over ideal beings. Although indifferent toward their actualization and epistemologically superior, without a proper actualization, ideal beings “float” without real function. Thus, ideal beings are imperfect and incomplete, unless tied to real beings. The key point is that these two spheres of being, these two worlds, are not just disparate but also united; they are two ways of being of the same world. In Hartmann’s words,

Ideal being can be found in the basic structure of everything real. Ontologically speaking, the whole sphere of the ideal is indifferent to the sphere of the real. But the two spheres do not exist independently, nor do we encounter them in mutual isolation. They are simply different ways of being. What distinguishes them radically is the fact that everything real is individual, unique, destructible; whereas everything ideal is universal, returnable, always existing.⁷

We can now connect Hartmann’s discussion of *Dasein* and *Sosein* to the real and ideal being. It has been generally assumed that *Dasein* is an existence that belongs to real being, while *Sosein* is, roughly, essence, which belongs to the mode of ideal being. Although we find such ideas maintained throughout the history of philosophy (even in Husserl!), they are incorrect. The basic relationship of *Dasein* and *Sosein* is conjunctive, while that of real and ideal being is disjunctive. The identity of *Dasein* and *Sosein* is dialectical, not tautological. With regard to the real and the ideal, they are not identical, either in the dialogical or tautological sense.

⁷ Hartmann, *Zur Grundlegung der Ontologie*, ch. 44b, 257. See Hartmann, *Der Aufbau der realen Welt*, chs. 55–60, 465–510. Hartmann’s most extensive treatment of Plato is in *Platos Logik des Seins* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1965).

Further insights may be gained by tying these distinctions on the possibility of a priori and a posteriori cognition. In the spirit of Kant, Hartmann argues that in an a priori manner we can know the ideal *Sosein*, the ideal *Dasein*, and the real *Sosein*, but never the real *Dasein*. A posteriori we can know the real *Dasein* and the real *Sosein*, but nothing about ideal being.⁸

While philosophical attention is more often related to the ideal than to real being, Hartmann urges us to focus on *real being* first. Real being incorporates in its structures, in its combination of *Dasein* and *Sosein*, ideal being as well. Real being poses the greatest challenge not only to our knowledge but also to our feeling of values. Far deeper and far more fundamental than purely cognitive acts are those that are emotionally grounded. Despite the modern preoccupation with the mind and thinking, Hartmann insists that our emotional responsiveness to reality is at the bottom of all cognitive activity. The existence of isolated cognitive activity, together with our traditional overestimation of the eternal and never-changing, is a mirage. According to Hartmann,

[Cognitive activity] does not know what it desires. It takes a fantasy for something real. This is why it lives removed from that which is truly valuable. The real values of human life are always in the transitory, they shine in the clear light in the movements of the real fulfillment. That which is truly valuable in life cannot last, because it is real. And if it were to last, then for man it would not shine with the light that overshadows everything.⁹

From this initial discussion we can already sense that the central task of Hartmann's ontological project is to lead us toward the rediscovery of the real. He wants us to focus on the concrete and temporal entities. This may be the first in a series of surprises that are awaiting us in the study of Hartmann's philosophy. While ontology may have a reputation of an abstract and disconnected discipline from the real world, its task is actually to lead us away from the proverbial "ivory tower" of philosophy and toward the richness and concreteness of the changing individual entities that populate the real world.

⁸ Hartmann, *Zur Grundlegung der Ontologie*, ch. 21a, 135.

⁹ Hartmann, *Zur Grundlegung der Ontologie*, ch. 50d, 320.

Strata of Real Being

For Hartmann, philosophy is anything but a trifling academic game. Philosophical problems spring neither from idle curiosity, nor from invented intellectual subtleties. They are enforced on us by phenomena incontestable to all willing to observe and think carefully, to all who have ever become aware of them. In Hartmann's words, "And behind the phenomena there is the world as it actually is, including man such as he is."¹

The primary concern of philosophy is "the world as it actually is, including man such as he is." In the terminology introduced earlier, philosophy's primary fascination must be with real being, not ideal being. In the previous section we have observed how Hartmann dispels the prejudice that being as being must refer to some higher, perfect form of being. Here we will consider how he turns against an even older, perhaps even more deeply rooted misconception that being as being must refer to something immovable and unchanging. Also we will discuss his understanding of the unity of being.

Hartmann claims that real being is becoming. Real being is changing, temporal, and individual. And what is changing, temporal, and individual cannot be rigid, motionless, and inimical to life. Nor can it be finished or perfect in every respect. On the contrary, everything real is in motion; it is in flux: "Motion and becoming form the universal mode of being of the real, no matter whether it be a question of material things, living forms, of human beings."²

There is a multiplicity of forms of real being in their complex developments and mutual interdependencies. We cannot expect to understand all of these complexities, or that they are all unfolding according to some super-rational "master plan." Hartmann is categorical in asserting that, "not everything in the world of reality, perhaps only the

¹ Hartmann, *Neue Wege der Ontologie*, ch. XI, 119.

² Hartmann, *Neue Wege der Ontologie*, ch. III, 47.

least part of it, is meaningful.”³ Yet many of these complexities can be untangled, at least partially, through a careful philosophical analysis. This analysis of the complex makeup of real being is the subject of Hartmann’s most ambitious ontological work, *The Structure of the Real World*.

The crux of Hartmann’s analysis consists in his opposition to all forms of reductivism and dualism. He establishes a pluralistic view of reality, with a dynamic interrelation of the four strata: the inorganic, the organic, the psychic, and the spiritual. Before we come to his positive view, let us consider some of his criticisms of monistic reductivism and exclusive dualism. For instance, the world cannot be ruled either from below, or from above. Identifying the real world with inorganic matter simply cannot explain the diversity of the phenomena in the world, including the organic, the psychic, and especially the spiritual. Nor is it possible to explain everything by means of an all-pervasive spiritual principle. There are aspects of reality that have nothing to do with anything spiritual and they cannot be reduced without a great degree of sophistry to the ruling principles of the spirit. Vitalism and psychologism fare no better as the sole explanatory principles of reality.

The ontological tradition usually wavers between a monistic reductivism and an exclusive dualism. Augustine’s dualism of the “sin-prone” body and the “God-given” soul has dominated religious thinking. Descartes’ dualism of the spatially extended, measurable, and mechanical substance on the one hand, and the nonspatial, nonextended inner thinking substance on the other, has had an even greater impact on modern philosophical thinking. According to Hartmann,

In this dichotomy the true and the untrue are disastrously confused. It is true that spatiality and materiality separate the two worlds of being from each other, but the idea of man as an entity composed of two heterogeneous substances has shown itself to be erroneous. The human being as a whole is too much of an indivisible unity. His activity, passivity and general condition are too obviously both corporeal and psychic. And, above all, the very life of man consists of an inseparable merging of the inner and the outer. Only an imaginative belief in immortality can derive benefit from this separation of substances. The real concrete life, with its constant blending of the two spheres, is not to be understood in this manner.⁴

³ Hartmann, *Neue Wege der Ontologie*, ch. IV, 52.

⁴ Hartmann, *Neue Wege der Ontologie*, ch. III, 44.

Notice how Hartmann always steers the ontological discussion toward the nature of man and his role and place in reality. He may begin with the most abstract of all questions (What is being as being?), but he does not restrict himself to abstractions. Indeed, how could he, when he thinks of reality in terms of changing, temporal, and individual beings? And, phenomenologically speaking, the most complex of such individual real beings is man. When we observe human beings, we see most clearly that the unity of being, as well as the unity of the real world, cannot be explained through one substance, whatever that substance may be. In human beings we find diversity that is nevertheless united, or, to put it the other way around, unity in diversity or heterogeneity. The unity of man, as well as the unity of the world, cannot be the unity of one principle, of one substance, or of any one thing. It must be the unity of a structure, complex as it is, and dynamically maintained. In man we recognize the presence of the inorganic, the organic, the psychic, and the spiritual layers.

We find in man a dynamic interrelation not only between these strata, but also within them. Opposition occurs between counteracting forces at the level of the inorganic, the level of pure physical processes, which (like action and reaction) are so related that they establish a dynamic balance. The spontaneous forces of self-regulation (dissimilation and assimilation) are at work to achieve a balance at the level of the living organism.

As expected, the strongest forms of oppositions are encountered at the most complex level: the level of the spiritual. At this level, balance is created by neither the natural law nor by a spontaneous self-regulation. Balance depends on the freedom of human beings in the structurally intertwined world.

Interconnectedness between different layers of the real world is even more intriguing than dynamic tension within the same stratum. The higher level is always built upon the lower and stronger one. It cannot exist without the lower level supporting it. Thus, life cannot exist without inorganic matter. Nor can the spirit somehow float in the world, without being attached and dependent on the lower strata of reality. As we will see later, this view consequently affects our understanding of morality and the nature of personality.

Hartmann's central insights with regard to the interlevel relationships of various strata is as follows. The lower levels of reality are the strongest, the highest are the weakest. The lowest and the strongest levels are the poorest, while the highest and the weakest are the richest. Although the elements of the lower strata are carried on into the higher strata, they are also transformed in the higher layers. Such transformations account for

the ontological novelty of every higher level with regard to every lower level.

Hartmann's account of how this happens is structurally similar to his explanation of the dialectic of the *Dasein* and *Sosein*. He illustrates it with the example of matter and form, perhaps the most misunderstood of all ontological distinctions. Matter and form are not to be understood in any absolute and static sense, neither in terms of an ultimate, insoluble material principle, nor in terms of an isolated and elevated form. Form and matter are relative in the sense that all form can be matter for a higher form, and all matter can be form for a lower matter. The atom is the matter of the molecules but is itself a formed structure. The molecule is the matter of the cell, which in turn is the matter of multicelled organism, and so on.

Besides this principle of *dependency*, the real world is also constructed on the related but different principle of *determination*. We understand this principle even less than the principle of dependency. For example, much of our thinking about the principle of determination is in terms of causes and effects. Yet they constitute only one form of determination. The basic principle of determination is rather the modal principle of sufficient reason. This principle affirms that nothing occurs in the world that does not have its (sufficient) ground in something else. The principle of sufficient reason is equally important for all strata of the real world. In the realm of thought, just like in the inorganic realm, nothing exists by chance in the ontological sense. Everything depends on some conditions and occurs only where these are fulfilled. If all conditions are fulfilled, they form a sufficient reason, and the event is bound to occur.

Human beings serve as the simplest and most convincing proof that reality is both layered and dynamically united. Man is a participant not only of the spatially extended inorganic and organic strata of reality, but also of its nonspatial psychic and spiritual layers. He is endowed with consciousness, as well as spirit. Modifying some insights of Hegel and Dilthey, Hartmann distinguishes a personal spirit from an objective spirit, which presents itself as a suprapersonal being manifested in institutions, legal order, culture, religion, science, speech, and so on. He calls these manifestations of the living and historically bounded supra-personal spirit: "objectified spirit." Hartmann avoids the prejudices of both supra-individual substantialism and of extreme individualism by arguing in favor of the reciprocity of the objective and the personal spirit. Paraphrasing Kant, he maintains that without a personal spirit, an objective spirit would be empty and devoid of content; while without an objective spirit, a personal spirit would be irresponsible and blind.

Now we can better understand why Hartmann insists that ontology is a fundamental philosophical discipline. In his view, there can be no anthropology without ontology, or the other way around.

The nature of man can be adequately understood only as the integrated whole of combining strata and, furthermore, as placed within the totality of the same order of strata which, outside of man, determines the structure of the real world. Man cannot be understood unless the world in which he lives and of which he is a part is understood, just as the world cannot be understood without an understanding of man – that one member of the world to which alone its structure is exhibited. This exhibition is the view of the world which philosophy sketches.⁵

⁵ Hartmann, *Neue Wege der Ontologie*, ch. XI, 120. See Hartmann's books, *Das Problem des geistigen Seins* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1950), ch. 6, 79–88, and *Philosophie der Natur* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1950), 522ff.

Categories of Real Being

In order to understand the nature of reality, we must comprehend its dynamic and layered structure. In order to grasp this structure we must discern the elements that compose it: the categories. Hence, as the fundamental task of ontology, Hartmann establishes the following: the determination of the categories characterizing each stratum of real being, and of those that are common for all four strata. Our task now is to discover the way he understands the nature and function of the categories, what categories he identifies, and how he determines their mutual relationship.

Like many other words taken from ordinary language and converted into technical terms, the word “category” did not initially suggest anything of philosophical relevance. The Greek noun *κατηγορία* means accusation and predication. As a verb, it means to accuse (*κατά* means against) someone at an assembly. Aristotle removes the negative connotation and uses this word to refer to the most general ways in which a subject-matter may be described. In a more technical sense, he uses it to refer to the structuring that corresponds to the real existence of things. He sometimes mentions three fundamental categories, sometimes eight, but most famously ten: substance, quantity, quality, relation, place, time, position, state, action, and affection (or condition). The Stoics recognize only four basic categories: subject, quality, state, and relation. Modern philosophers, such as Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, and Locke, focus on the triad: substance, mode, and relation.

Kant brings categories into prominence in *Critique of Pure Reason*. He criticizes Aristotle for the random procedure he uses to “collect” the categories, as well as for mixing those belonging to sensibility with those originating in a rational capacity. For Kant, categories are not mere descriptions of what is given in experience but the principles (rules) for the construction of the forms of experience. Only by means of the application of these pure, a priori categorial concepts can we understand how anything in the manifold of given appearances can be combined into and thought of

as objects of our cognitive judgments. The categories are the foundation of a systematic unity of our way of cognition.¹

For Kant, the categories are not primarily the determinations of being; they are not primarily ontological. Rather, they are epistemological concepts. In his terminology, they are the concepts of the understanding necessary for the synthesis of experience. Kant provides both the “metaphysical” and the “transcendental” deduction of the categories, that is, the “proofs” of their pure origin and objective validity. He systematically presents them in four groups (quantity, quality, relation, and modality), each of which contains exactly three subcategories (unity, plurality, totality; reality, negation, limitation; substance and accident, causality and dependence, community; possibility–impossibility, existence–nonexistence, necessity–contingency).

Hegel’s *Logic* opens the way for the development of ontology in terms of a systematic analysis of the categories. He continues Kant’s analysis of categories and significantly enriches our understanding of them by liberating us from Kant’s unnecessary epistemological constraints. Unlike Kant, Hegel goes back to the most primordial ontological concepts: being and its opposite: nonbeing, or nothingness. Without these categories there is no possibility of explaining the becoming, or the emergence of anything new. In contrast to Kant’s static and a-temporal a priori concepts, the categories become the principal means of development in Hegel’s dialectic. This dialectic is the movement, even the essential unrest, of the concept. Hegel feels obliged to bring this unrest to an end, to a definitive conclusion. The tension between the thesis and the antithesis is thereby overcome and the dialectical process ends in a higher synthesis. This synthesis is not just the highest but also the lowest point of Hegel’s thinking, insofar as he turns being into concept and concept into being: the real is rational and the rational is real.

After Hegel, there has been a diverse development in the understanding of categories. According to Hartmann, it has generally moved in a mistaken direction, in the direction of their further subjectivization. For example, Wilhelm Wundt asserts that categories represent the last stages in every organization of the material of perception. For Hans Vaihinger, they are only purposive fictions (“*als ob*” — as if), which emerge from practical purposes. For Edmund Husserl, categories are the simple and not further dissolvable unities of meaning.

A few clarifications must be made before we turn to Hartmann’s view. Because there are many kinds of categories, from here on we will use

¹ See, for instance, Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: Palgrave, 2003), A65–7/BB90–2, A79–80/B105–6.

“categories” to refer exclusively to ontological categories, unless otherwise noted. Even among the ontological categories there are some that belong to all spheres of being (“modal categories”), some to the entire real world (“fundamental” categories), and some to a specific level of reality (“special” categories). Hartmann discusses the first group of these ontological categories in *Possibility and Actuality*, the second in *The Structure of the Real World*, and the third in *Philosophy of Nature*. We will focus primarily on the fundamental and special categories, which apply to the realm of real being.

Hartmann calls our attention to three typical misconceptions regarding categories. First, a category is usually not distinguished from a concept of that category. Second, there is a lack of distinction between ontological and epistemological categories. Third, there is an assumption that categories of being must exist either in some linguistic or mentalistic realm, or on their own. Hartmann denies both horns of this false dilemma. Ontological categories exist only as the determinations of being; they are immanent to real being. They are not applied to reality by the cognizing mind, or by the competent users of language. Categories are inherent in things themselves and in the events they determine. They articulate the *Sosein* of real entities: their configurations, structures, and contents, but not their existence.

Categories are the principles of real being insofar as they deal with what is universal and necessary. Since every discipline aims at uncovering its principles, ontology becomes centrally oriented on a systematic analysis of categories. Hartmann’s “New Ways of Ontology” transforms the treatment of ontology that dominated from Aristotle to Christian Wolff: from being a science of being as being, ontology becomes a categorial analysis. In *The Structure of the Real World* alone, Hartmann engages in an analysis of 58 ontological categories. We cannot consider in any detail his individual findings, but have to outline his general conception of categories.

Categories do not exist in isolation from other categories. Nor are they limited in number. Thus, new ontology must endeavor to establish exactly what categories are the basic determinants of each strata of real being. This undertaking must also explain how categories of various strata interrelate and co-determine each other.

Hartmann lists the categories of the inorganic, or the corporeal world, as: space and time, process and condition, substantiality and causality, and dynamic structures and dynamic equilibrium. The categories of animate nature include: adaptation and purposiveness, metabolism, self-regulation, self-restoration, the life of the species, and the constancy and variation of the species. He establishes the categories of the psychic layer of reality as: act

and content, pleasure and displeasure, consciousness and unconsciousness. Finally, the categories of the spirit are: thought, knowledge, will, freedom, evaluation, and personality.

Unlike the categories specific for one stratum, the “fundamental” categories (common for all strata of real being) came in pairs: principle–*concretum*; structure–*modus*; form–matter; inner–outer; determination–dependence; quality–quantity; unity–manifoldness; harmony–conflict; contrast–dimension; discretion–continuity; substratum–relation; element–structure.

There is no dominant category of one layer, nor is there a dominant pair of categories that determines all the strata of real being. All categories of one stratum jointly determine everything and share in all particulars. The fundamental categories are so related that in every pair each of the categories presupposes its counterpart, and is in turn presupposed by it. For example, form presupposes matter—for it must be the form of some matter—and matter is what it is only as a matter of some form that shapes and structures it.

The categories of each stratum are interrelated in a *homogeneous* way from *within*. The categories of various strata are interrelated in a *heterogeneous* way from *without*. The categories of a lower stratum are superior with regard to their strength in comparison to the categories of any higher stratum. Yet they are poorer in terms of their structure. Hartmann sometimes uses the technical terms “super-information” and “super-imposition” to clarify the relations of the categories belonging to various strata. The former term refers to the penetration from down up, the integration of the categories of a lower stratum into the categories of a higher stratum, and their modification on a new level. The latter phrase means that the categories of a lower stratum provide a basis or ground for the buildup of the categories of a higher stratum, as well as a limitation or constraint for this buildup. The super-information and the super-imposition thus guarantee the recurrence and categorial continuity among various strata of real being. They also account for a novelty at each higher stratum, which secures the diversity of the strata.

In *The Structure of the Real World*, Hartmann formulates the most important intercategory relationships as the four categorial laws:

1. The law of validity: categories have their being as structures of concrete things and apart from these they have no validity.
2. The law of coherence: categories have no isolated existence for themselves, but are determined and united by the whole categorial structure.

3. The law of hierarchical order: categories of the lower strata are contained in the higher, but not the other way around.
4. The law of dependence: the dependence of categories is asymmetrical, with the higher categories dependent on the lower, though their categorial novelty is thereby not limited.²

Hartmann's comprehensive categorial analysis consists neither in purely a priori knowledge, nor in its purely a posteriori counterpart. It presupposes the whole breadth of human experience, from everyday life to the most elaborate scientific research. It also relies on philosophical experience as recorded in the historical development of human thought, as a long series of attempts and proposals, disappointments and self-corrections. This entire sum of accumulated experience and critical insights furnishes a starting point for our categorial analysis.

This grand project of the accumulation of all human experience and thought leads Hartmann to three convictions. The first amounts to a recognition of the rootedness of real being. Like the segments of a tree, the higher strata are rooted in the lower. All the strata are interconnected, without being reducible to each other. Second, the ontological principles must somehow be included in being. Consequently, it must be possible to discern them, at least to a degree, if only a sufficiently broad basis of ontological data is supplied. The third conviction takes a dialectical turn in a somewhat opposite direction. No matter how far our categorial analysis takes us, regardless of how systematically it is undertaken, its pursuit will lead to no definitive knowledge. It will only lead to further realizations of the wonders of the world and the limits of our rationality. As Hartmann so memorably wrote:

Every deeper grasping of some category is at the same time the discovery of some deeper problem. In our attempts toward solutions our problems increase, and with them also our wonder in front of the ungraspable [*Unbegreiflich*]. If anywhere, than in the investigation of the categories it must become clear that the ultimate meaning of the philosophical cognition is not so much the solution of the puzzles as the exposure of wonder [*ein Aufdeckung von Wunder*].³

² Hartmann, *Der Aufbau der realen Welt*, chs. 55–60, 465–510. For further discussion, see Roberto Poli, "Hartmann's Theory of Categories: Introductory Remarks," in R. Poli, C. Scognamiglio, and F. Tremblay (eds), *The Philosophy of Nicolai Hartmann*, 1–32.

³ Hartmann, *Grundzüge einer Metaphysik der Erkenntnis*, ch. 34d, 264.

Categories of Being and Categories of Cognition

“Man knows things by means of his categories, but he does not need a knowledge of these categories for the purpose.” This is Hartmann’s fundamental view. He further explains: “Knowledge of categories does not come until epistemology develops, but knowledge of things does not have to wait for epistemology.”¹

Hartmann follows Plato and Aristotle in the conviction that epistemology does not come before ontology, nor can it replace ontology. Our commonsense knowledge and scientific practices are based on the premise that the world is what it is, whether we know of it or not. The natural direction of our attention is toward things, toward cognizing what the world is like. Hartmann calls this primal attitude: “*intentio recta*.”

Owing to a collapse of the ancient and medieval worldviews, Descartes redirects the course of the traditional thinking. Instead of focusing on what we (can) know, philosophers become preoccupied with a meta-level inquiry: “How do we know that we know?” The cognizing mind becomes the fixation of modern philosophers. We search not so much for knowledge, but for the knowledge of knowledge. In Hartmann’s terminology, our attention turns away from reality, away from being. It turns toward the analysis of our thoughts about being; from *intentio recta* toward *intentio obliqua*.²

Kant plays a twofold role in this process. First, he brings this self-reflective attitude of the mind to its highest point in his *Critique of Pure Reason*. Second, his analysis of how we cognize, of our knowledge of

¹ Hartmann, *Der Aufbau der realen Welt*, ch. 12a, 118.

² See Hartmann, *Zur Grundlegung der Ontologie*, ch. 3d and *passim*. Michael Landmann explains this fundamental distinction in terms of two opposite metaphysical orientations: the world oriented and the subject (mind) oriented; see his *Philosophical Anthropology*, trans. D. J. Parent (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1974), 62–5.

knowledge, reveals that besides temporal there are also insurmountable boundaries of human cognition. *Critique* is the highest point not only of our knowledge of knowledge, but also of our knowledge of ignorance. Among those things that we cannot know are the answers to the eternal metaphysical questions we long to know the most: the existence of God, the immortality of the soul and the possibility of freedom. Kant simultaneously develops Western intellectualism to its highest peak and leads it to the brink of collapse.

Kant's intention is not to destroy metaphysics. His aim is to replace the old, speculative and untenable way of doing metaphysics with a new way that would make it scientifically respectable. In this process, he accomplishes a number of remarkable achievements but also commits a series of far-reaching mistakes. Among Kant's greatest accomplishments are the discovery of the antinomies of pure reason and the deduction of categories. Both accomplishments are based on Kant's rephrasing of the old and neglected question in a bold and imaginative way: How are synthetic a priori judgments possible?

"A priori" is a way of knowledge independent of experience. Mathematics has always been best evidence of this. In magical ways, we can anticipate that the real world must conform to certain pure insights, especially with regard to some quantifiable relations. Yet there are many a priori judgments that are not mathematical, judgments that have nothing to do with quantities. Metaphysical assertions belong to such synthetic a priori judgments. The antinomies reveal not only that we can form contradictory metaphysical assertions (e.g. God exists and God does not exist), but also that we can produce evidence—"proofs"—that seems equally supportive of them.

In an attempt to understand how we make any synthetic judgments at all, and then what would make such judgments objectively valid (rather than antinomical), Kant rediscovers the categories. While it seems that objects are ontologically prior to our cognitions and that our knowledge must conform to these objects, it is really the objects that turn around us, the cognitive subjects. In order to be known, these objects must conform to our forms of intuition (space and time) and our categories. Kant formulates this insight as the highest principle of all synthetic judgments: "the conditions of the possibility of experience in general are likewise conditions of the possibility of the objects of experience."³

Hartmann is convinced that Kant is right about arguing that only the identity of the categories of being and the categories of cognition can

³ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A158/B197.

provide satisfactory explanation for the possibility of synthetic judgments. More generally, only their identity can provide an acceptable account of the puzzling metaphysical wonder that occurs in every cognitive experience: the interaction of the mind and the world. Yet Hartmann puts a twist on Kant's fundamental realization: even though it is true that only the identity of principles can bridge the duality of subject and object without abolishing them, nevertheless, "it is irrelevant whether these principles are primarily principles of the object or of the subject, or stand neutrally above both of them."⁴

There are various reasons for Kant's acceptance of an unnecessarily subjectivist interpretation of the highest principle of all synthetic judgments. One of them is that, like Wolff before him and Hegel after him, Kant does not make a significant distinction between categories (themselves) and our concepts of categories. Our concepts of categories are our attempts—partially adequate and complete, partially not—to grasp the categories and their interrelations. The categories themselves are indifferent to being known and captured conceptually.

In Hartmann's view, Kant also does not separate the categories of cognition from the known categories; he confuses the principles that make knowledge possible and the known principles. This is the mistake of the entire epistemological turn of modern philosophy. In an embryonic form, it is already visible in Descartes' conviction that he cannot have any knowledge about the world unless he proves the skeptical arguments as unfounded.

This modern epistemological turn—which prioritizes the reflection of the conditions of the possibility of cognition over the investigation of the nature of objects of cognition, the *intentio obliqua* over the *intentio recta*—has turned us away from ontology. There are numerous problems with this epistemological twist. First, there is no valid reason to believe in a complete overlap of ontological and epistemological categories; since consciousness represents only one realm of being, and the objects to be known belong to all strata of being, it is quite possible that there can be many more ontological than cognitive categories. Second, it is not at all clear that the principles of the cognitive subject would be more knowable, or more easily accessible, than the principles of the objects. Indeed, even if the principles of subject were known, would that necessarily explain the principles that govern the object? Finally, and most paradoxically,

⁴ Hartmann, *Grundzüge einer Metaphysik der Erkenntnis*, ch. 17b, 151. For further discussion, see L. W. Beck, "Nicolai Hartmann's Criticism of Kant's Theory of Knowledge," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 2:1942, 472–500.

the epistemological deviation from the normal course of investigation leads to a subsequent abandonment of the strictly epistemological question. This question deals with the *relation* of subject and object in the cognitive experience, and it is replaced by either psychologism or logicism. In the language of contemporary analytic philosophy, this shift leads either toward “epistemology naturalized” or toward the analysis of knowledge in terms of Gettier-like necessary and sufficient conditions of knowledge.⁵

Let us, however, return to the topic more pertinent in this context. For Kant, human reason is not a thing among things, or a being among beings. So he needs to postulate something like “consciousness in general” (or a “transcendental subject”) as the carrier of the entire cognitive edifice. He thinks he needs it as the source and the applier of all categorial determination to the appearances given to us. On the other side of the transcendental subject, Kant must postulate a thing as it is in itself. That is, he postulates a being independent of and indifferent toward the conditions under which it appears to us. Without postulating such a thing in itself, he suspects that genuine cognitive experience is no different than illusion.

Hartmann argues that if we think outside of the Kantian framework, we must wonder again: Just what is reason? What could a transcendental and cognizing subject be, if not a being among beings? Are not even cognition and a subject’s consciousness also forms of being? In German, unlike English, even ordinary language points toward the connection of cognition and being: the German word for “consciousness” is *Bewußtsein*, which clearly has its root in *Sein*, which means being. Consciousness is a being that is aware of other beings.

Kant is right to claim that reason is not a thing among things. Does this mean, however, that reason is not a being among beings? The whole language of things, which we have inherited from the Parmenidean–Aristotelian way of thinking, is rendered dubious not only by the exaggerated focus on reason and subjectivity, but even more by thinking about the thing in itself. What is this mysterious thing in itself? It may be understandable in its negative sense (its concept being a “limiting concept”), but it is quite puzzling in a positive sense. If it is a thing, then it should be determinable by means of the categories that reason applies to all other things (objects) that provide the material for experience and thinking. By Kant’s definition, however, that cannot be the case.

⁵ For further discussion, inspired by Hartmann, see Predrag Cicovacki, *Anamorphosis: Kant on Knowledge and Ignorance* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1997), ch. 1, 17–47.

Hartmann deviates from Kant with regard to the thing in itself. It is a being, and it is exactly what we *can* know, if cognition is to be possible at all. Our knowledge is not about how things appear, but about how they are. According to Hartmann, “being is the common sphere in which subject and object stand over against each other.”⁶ There is no valid reason for pushing anything outside of the sphere of being, neither any alleged transcendental subject, nor some unknowable thing in itself. Knowers are existents; they are real beings, just as the things and events they attempt to know are existent and real. “Principles of cognition are . . . ontological principles, which is possible only if cognition itself has a being, is a kind of being.”⁷

This is one of the most important implications of Hartmann’s thesis of the continuity of all being. Now we can grasp the relevance of the fundamental categories, the categories common for all strata of real being. Such categories are transformed at each new layer. Nevertheless, enough remains structurally the same throughout such transformations, enough to guarantee the possibility of a unity of all being.

The unity of all being is the unity amidst heterogeneity, diversity, complexity, and conflict. This unity is not the unity of things, of the static forms of being, but the unity of structures in the turmoil of various interconnections. Real being is not the being of separate and discontinuous things. This being is the being of related, interpenetrating structures and principles, the unity of the categorial co-determinations. Real being is the being in becoming. The real world, we can say in Hartmann’s name, is a structured chaos.

According to this dynamic conception of real being, there is no imposition of principles from below or from above, from the subject or from the object. Hartmann thereby avoids the mistake of ascribing to the lower strata the categories characteristic of the higher strata (as in spiritualism and psychologism). He also avoids the error of subsuming the categories of the higher strata to those of the lower strata (as in mechanicism and vitalism). There is no need for the *complete* identity of the categories throughout the entire sphere of real being, which is the assumption that led to these two types of fallacious reasoning.

This is the crucial point in which Hartmann corrects Kant and subject-oriented philosophy. It is not necessary to postulate a complete identity of the categories in order to justify our belief in the unity of all being. Of course, if we wholly deny the identity of the categories,

⁶ Hartmann, *Grundzüge einer Metaphysik der Erkenntnis*, ch. 14b, 138.

⁷ Hartmann, *Grundzüge einer Metaphysik der Erkenntnis*, ch. 63b, 489.

we cannot explain this unity. But their partial identity is sufficient to account for it. Kant's thesis, that the conditions of the possibility of experience are at the same time the conditions of the possibility of objects of experience, can be accepted without being interpreted in the subjectivist way. Since cognitive subject is part of the overall being, the conditions of the possibility of cognition can be interpreted in an objective, mind-independent way.

Ontology of Cognition

Hartmann speaks of cognition in terms of *Erfassung*, which can be translated as “grasping.” The subject reaches out “to grasp” the object. As a verb, to grasp makes us think of grasping by a hand, of seizing, and holding. Hartmann reminds us that there is not just physical but also mental grasping.

Cognition is not creation of any kind, as Neo-Kantians come to believe, by radicalizing Kant’s transcendental idealism and rejecting the thing in itself. In cognitive experience, counters Hartmann, an object is not created. An object is a *Gegen-stand*, something that stands against the cognizing mind and shows resistance (*Wider-stand*) to its ideas and anticipations. An object of cognition is entirely indifferent to being known. The cognitive relation does not change the nature of the object.

Our grasping of this indifferent object is never complete. The real being we confront is not exhausted by that which is given to our consciousness and reproduced by it. Although its comprehension is the ultimate aim of our cognition, “we never grasp the *concretum* in its fullness, but at best certain immediate determinations of the *concretum* as such; that is why this source of cognition has the dignity of the testimony of reality.”¹ Real being is richer than the sphere of the given and the grasped.

The grasping of any real being involves both a posteriori and a priori aspects. These aspects “speak two different languages, but they speak of the same thing.”² The a posteriori aspect aims at the object in its individuality and contingency. The a priori aspect reaches only as far as the general and necessary. The boundaries between a priori and a posteriori, as well as those between spontaneity and receptivity, thinking and intuition, are far more blurred than Kant assumes. Even in a posteriori cognition we cognize something general. This generality, however, is not the same generality that

¹ Hartmann, *Grundzüge einer Metaphysik der Erkenntnis*, ch. 57b, 439.

² Hartmann, *Grundzüge einer Metaphysik der Erkenntnis*, ch. 57c, 441.

we cognize by means of a priori cognition (that is, generality as necessity and universality). For example, we cognize the property of red as a general property of an individual object. There is no sensible property that in itself does not contain something general in this sense, as Aristotle and Hegel have documented.

A priori cognition also involves an element of receptivity, which is different than the one that occurs in a posteriori cognition. It is similar with spontaneity, which Kant reserves exclusively for a priori cognition. Every active directing of the subject toward his objects, be they knowable a priori or a posteriori, is a spontaneous act. This spontaneity does not exclude the receptive element, nor is only receptivity characteristic of a posteriori cognition.

In Hartmann's view, the distinctions between a priori and a posteriori, thinking and intuition, and spontaneity and receptivity, are epistemologically of secondary importance. Fascination with these distinctions is a reflection of the shift from the *intentio recta* toward the *intentio obliqua*, of the modern distortion of the cognitive phenomenon. The distortion is responsible not only for the prioritization of these distinctions, but also for the neglect of the truly significant elements of cognition.

To clarify this view, Hartmann distinguishes four aspects of cognition: the psychological, the logical, the ontological, and the epistemological. The first of them deals with the question of psychological form with regard to the reaching of the cognitive subject. The second concerns the problem of the logical comprehension of the grasped object. The third investigates the ontological status of the object and the subject. The fourth and most important is the problem of the subject's reaching out toward the object: the problem of grasping as such.

Hartmann further groups these four aspects into two general classes: the psychological and the logical aspects deal with the nonmetaphysical side of the cognitive relation. The ontological and the epistemological concern its metaphysical segment. The epistemological turn of modern philosophy shifts our attention toward its nonmetaphysical aspects. Hartmann, by contrast, argues that the heart of the issue is in the metaphysical side of cognition. He also mentions that the ontological and the epistemological aspects are not only indispensable but also complimentary. This is why he attempts to develop a metaphysics of cognition.³

³ Nicolas Berdyaev praises Hartmann for insisting on this view; see his *The Beginning and the End*, trans. R. M. French (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957), 42.

What is wrong with the nonmetaphysical and anti-ontological turn of modern philosophy? In short, it misses the very cognitive relation between the subject and the object that it purports to explain. Instead of cognitive relation proper, it focuses either on the processes in the subject (psychologism), or on the ideal structures of the object (logicism).

Since all cognition is conditioned by the subject, it may appear that cognition has its roots in a general process of consciousness and the principles determining this process. When drawing this conclusion, we are prone to turn the problem of cognition into a psychological problem. While it is clear that every structure of cognition has its psychological genesis—remember the early modern discussions of the ultimate origin of knowledge—this genesis cannot explain the structure of cognition itself. Whether in its classical form (rationalism and empiricism), or in its modern counterpart (such as epistemology naturalized), psychologism remains too narrowly focused on the psychological acts and processes that happen in the subject's consciousness. It neglects the relationship with something existing outside and independently of any consciousness. Psychologism misses the relationship with the object.

The problem of the structure of cognition is taken seriously by logicism. This orientation ignores the individual psychological processes by means of which a subject comes to know any object and focuses on the ideal structure of that object. It directs attention to the "logic" of cognition, to what makes our cognition "objective." Regardless of whether this logic is transcendental (as in Kant), dialectical (as in Hegel), or formal (as in analytic epistemology), in logicism the move is always made in the same direction: first from the laws of logic to the laws of thinking, and then from the laws of thinking to the laws of real being.

While these logical structures are required to explain the objectivity of our cognition, and however important the logical structures of thinking imposed on the object of cognition are, they fail to grasp the essence of the phenomenon of cognition. Logicism creates rational constructs that stand outside of real cognition. Because the rational is traditionally identified with knowledge, and knowledge is understood in close association with judgments, philosophers are prone to overestimate its relevance for the cognitive relation. They focus unduly on internal coherence and underestimate the nonrational and nonjudgmental aspects of knowledge. They also neglect the ontological status of the actual object and the cognitive nature of the subject-object relationship.

Cognition is a relation between one's consciousness and its object. As such, it transcends consciousness. This relation also goes beyond the mere logical structures that must be applicable to any object, in order for it to

become an object of our thinking. The product of consciousness can never be similar to anything outside of consciousness. Nevertheless, the product of consciousness must represent its object as it is. It must somehow capture and repeat the determinations of its object, which exists independently of the consciousness representing it.

Cognition is a result of the confrontation of the subject and the object, of the knower and the known. They each exist on their own, so that their confrontation must have an indispensable ontological element. The cognitive relation is rooted in an ontological relation. While knowledge belongs to a conscious being, its objects are positioned out among all strata of being. We have already seen how Hartmann's new ontology explains the relationship between various strata of real being, their difference (in the form of the categorial novelty) without denying their continuity (in the form of the categorial recurrence). Now we have to pay more attention to what Hartmann calls the "epistemological" aspect of cognition.

The result of cognition is something "third," different from the subject and the object. It is also irreducible to them. Thus, this something third has a peculiar relation to each of them: according to its ontological sphere and psychological origin, it belongs to the subject and can be modified by it. With the object, it shares the form of objectivity and a predictable pattern of behavior. This further thing, a representation of the relation of the subject and the object, is a constitutive element of the cognitive relation. It is also the source of a great aporia: If the subject and the object are so different, if the gap between them seems so unbridgeable, how can the subject reach toward the object and gain an adequate representation of it?

Grasping the object by the subject must involve some fundamental overlapping and correspondence.⁴ Overlapping and correspondence do not presuppose their similarity. The products of consciousness can never be similar to any out-of-consciousness paradigms. They must, nevertheless, represent them faithfully. While the dog that I see may be furry and black, my representation of a dog is neither furry nor black. Yet, it must be a representation of this particular dog, and not of any other. If it is not, then the concepts of truth and illusion lose their meaning. Indeed, the whole relation of cognition loses its primary function.

Hartmann explains the correspondence in question in terms of a partial identity of the categories of being and the categories of cognition: "only if

⁴ As Nicolai Hartmann puts it elegantly in *Ethik*, "Truth is the objective agreement (*Übereinstimmung*) of thought, or conviction, with the existing situation"; ch. 50g, [II, 281]. See Hartmann, *Grundzüge einer Metaphysik der Erkenntnis*, chs. 5h, 6e, 7e, and 55-7; and *Die Erkenntnis im Lichte der Ontologie* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1982), ch. 3, 15-24.

these two coincide can thought hit off being.” The secret is in “the recurrence of [ontological] categories of lower strata in the structure of the intelligent spirit.”⁵

The categories of the lower strata recur in the content of knowledge of the higher strata. This recurrence accounts for the possibility of coordination between the subject and the object, so that the former can adequately represent the latter, despite their difference and independence. Hartmann calls it a “reduplication” of the categories in the cognitive relationship: “The same categories confront each other in the object and the subject: in the object as categories of the real, in the subject as categories of content only.”⁶

The details of such a reduplication of the categories are not only baffling but also, for the most part, inaccessible to us. As Kant already realized, it may be easier to explain such reduplication in the realm of quantitative categories. How it happens with all other (nonquantitative) categories is yet to be comprehended. Although Kant errs in his turn toward logicism in his explanation of the possibility of cognition, Hartmann believes that his account of the possibility of all synthetic judgments is still valuable:

If we now remember that the a priori element of knowledge depends on the identity of cognitive and ontological categories and that the limits of this identity are also the limits of apriorism, the modification of this recurrence becomes a matter of considerable importance. For epistemologically it becomes a real task to define with precision for every particular case the deviation from the ontological category. Obviously this cannot be done summarily for all categories but only by detailed analysis, the factor of deviation from the corresponding category of the real being a different one in every cognitive category.⁷

Instead of a general deduction of all categories in Kant’s style, Hartmann thus proposes a detailed analysis for every single category. He does not complete this project, but the general orientation of his account is as clear as it appears irrefutable. Epistemology presupposes ontology (to account for the resistance of the real), just as ontology presupposes epistemology (for the sake of categorial analysis). They are mutually conditioning, even though such conditioning need not be of the same kind, or equally valuable.

⁵ Hartmann, *Neue Wege der Ontologie*, ch. XIII, 133.

⁶ Hartmann, *Neue Wege der Ontologie*, ch. XIII, 134.

⁷ Hartmann, *Neue Wege der Ontologie*, ch. XIII, 134–5.

Critique of Intellectualism

Hartmann is particularly interested in four distinguishable aspects of cognition:

1. Cognition as a relation of the subject and the object
(= the cognitive relation).
2. Cognition as a representation of the object in the subject
(= the product of cognition).
3. Cognition as a correspondence of the representation with its object
(= the truth of cognition).
4. Cognition as the tendency of representations to become more and more adequate to the full content of their objects (= the progress of cognition).

The thesis of the dependency of epistemology on ontology means that the ultimate source of the cognitive relation is rooted on the other side of cognition and cognizability, where it is not anymore confronted by the subject. In the distance from the subject, the object is nothing but an independently existing being. When the limit of cognition is left behind and there is only an ontological being in its indifference, this ultimate source of cognition is exactly the being as it is in itself.

Hartmann's ontological view undermines the deeply ingrained epistemological optimism of the Western intellectual tradition. The expectation that everything that exists must at least in principle be knowable, coupled with an exaggerated faith in the power of the human intellect, we can call "intellectualism." The tendency of intellectualism is to assume a complete, or near complete, identity of the sphere of the logical, the rational, and the real. Hartmann's counters that the three spheres cannot be treated as overlapping, because they each have their own principles, which differ not only in numbers, but are also of dissimilar, mutually irreducible natures.

Hartmann's criticism of intellectualism targets its exaggerated faith in the power of the intellect in its various aspects. Intellectualism postulates the existence of harmony: (i) within the intellect, (ii) between being and thought, and, subsequently, (iii) within being itself.

Against (i), Hartmann warns that the intellect leads to distortions when separated from other nonrational functions of the subject. He is persistent in his protest against the artificial separation of cognitive relation from the broader life-nexus: "Emotional awareness of reality lies at the bottom of all cognitive activity."¹

With regard to (ii), Hartmann argues that there is only a partial identity of the categories of being and the categories of thinking. Such partial identity is sufficient to account for the possibility of knowledge of the real world. It is insufficient, however, to ensure that everything that exists must, even in principle, be known.

After his careful consideration of (iii), Hartmann does not deny the existence of the structure of being, but argues that its structure must be understood in the way of categorial co-dependencies and interdependencies, in a dynamic manner that does not exclude conflict. The view that being is itself in disharmony and that conflict is its form of being may well be the most important insight of Hartmann's entire ontological opus.

Hartmann traces the sources of intellectualism to the postulates that (i) all being is harmoniously structured, and that (ii) this structure is knowable at least in principle. Throughout the history of Western philosophy these two assumptions are usually either accepted together, or rejected together. Even the twentieth-century philosophers, such as Husserl and Cassirer, believe that because we must accept that being is structured, we have also to assume that it is rational and knowable. On the opposite side of the spectrum, there are more and more contemporary philosophers who, like Bergson and Gadamer, believe that we must deny the rationality and knowability of all being, and are therefore also forced to question its mind-independent structure.

In opposition to both camps, Hartmann follows an unusual, insufficiently tested path. He accepts that being is always structured and ordered, but rejects the thesis of its complete rationality and knowability. The ontological categories do not fully coincide with the epistemological categories. This is the case with both real and ideal being. For example, real being is structured, and this structure (inherent in being) can be understood in terms of the plurality of ontological layers and its categorial

¹ Hartmann, *Zur Grundlegung der Ontologie*, ch. 28d, 202.

determination. This structure is dynamic and bi-linear: the lower and stronger strata provide the roots of all being in the way that preserves the recurrence of the categories of the lower strata in the higher layers. Consciousness and spirit do not float in thin air and exist on their own. They are rooted in the same categories that ground the lower strata: there is no consciousness and spirit without the inorganic and the organic layers and their categorial determinations. The structure of real being is bi-linear because, despite their dependence on the lower layers, the higher and weaker strata have the elements of novelty that cannot be reduced to the grounding elements of the lower strata. For Hartmann, dependence and independence always go together. The same goes for rationality and irrationality, knowability and unknowability, and all other categorial pairs.

This is a radically new way of thinking about reality. Predictably, like all such novelties, Hartmann's dialectical ontology draws criticisms from both opposing camps. Those who accept the structure and knowability of being accuse him of giving up too quickly on rationality. Those who reject the knowability and inherent structure of being see, in his view, an attempt to preserve the kind of rationality that we do not have. Let us look at some examples of both kinds of objections.

Cassirer grants to Hartmann that, while phenomenologically body and soul are one, ontologically we cannot explain their unity. Our central ontological categories have always been those of substance and cause, but these categories are incapable of articulating how this mysterious unity occurs. However philosophers attempt to explain the relationship of body and soul, there always remains some metaphysical reminder that defies rational thought. Cassirer admits that:

It is the essential merit of Nicolai Hartmann to have grasped this situation with his characteristic acuteness and rigor and to have stated it without reserve. In his metaphysics of knowledge Hartmann no longer undertakes, like the older metaphysical systems, to dispel this twilight: he attempts solely to disclose it. He no longer seeks to solve the riddles of metaphysics at any price but contents himself with stating them clearly and fully. Thus for him "aporetics" becomes an essential component of metaphysics.²

Cassirer's criticism is that, despite his acute diagnoses of the problem, Hartmann makes an incorrect inference. He does not infer a deficiency of

² Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, Vol. 3, *The Phenomenon of Knowledge*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1957), 97.

the categories we rely on (substance and causality), but an irrationality of being. He shifts “the incomprehensibility and contradiction into the core of reality itself.”³

Cassirer’s words were first published in 1929, and written probably a few years earlier. At that time Hartmann had no book on ontology. Cassirer’s presentation relies on Hartmann’s book, *Basic Elements of a Metaphysics of Knowledge* (published in 1921) and his essay, “How is Critical Ontology Possible?” (published in 1924, in a collection edited by Cassirer himself).⁴ He can thus be excused for claiming that Hartmann does not see the deficiency of our central categories. Hartmann later provides perhaps the most comprehensive and original categorial analysis in the history of Western philosophy that demonstrates that there is no such deficiency within categories themselves. We must look for the source of our difficulties elsewhere.

Let us thus focus on the second part of Cassirer’s criticism: Hartmann shifts the contradiction into the core of reality itself. Strictly speaking, contradictions occur in thought, not in reality. “Contradiction” is a logical, not an ontological category; it belongs to ideal, not real being. What occurs in reality is oppositions and conflicts. Structure and order do not imply harmony. Nor does unity presuppose harmony. Being is not a closed and static system, built in accordance with some rationally constructed “chain of being.” Being is becoming, a complex dynamical system in which there is a structure that establishes (and re-establishes) an always-temporary equilibrium among various strata and aspects of being.

Conflict is the form of being, which is why philosophical thinking leads to aporias. This is also why no genuine antinomy can be resolved, and why we have to accept the limits of rationality. Hartmann should not be accused of turning against rationality, however, nor as being a proponent of irrationalism. As Nicholas Berdyaev expresses it in a spirit similar to Hartmann, “Antinomy and anti-thesis are by no means evidence of weakness of mind. On the contrary through its fixing of boundaries it represents a great achievement of reason.”⁵

The fixing of boundaries of reason allows Hartmann to claim a limited harmony of being, understood in a way that does not exclude that the structure of being is partially irrational. As it is, this structure is sufficient to enable a dynamic equilibrium of being, as well as our pursuit of

³ Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, Vol. 3, 97.

⁴ Hartmann, “Wie ist kritische Ontologie überhaupt möglich?” in E. Cassirer (ed.), *Festschrift für Paul Natorp* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1924), 124–77.

⁵ Berdyaev, *The Beginning and the End*, 24.

objective knowledge. Hartmann's view does not leave any room for doubt that there are "cracks" both in "the cosmic egg" and the rational mind exploring it. We habitually refuse to confront those cracks and limitations. Our expectations blind us for the resistance of reality that our ideas and theoretical constructs encounter, and we conveniently patch them over. We have learned that, even in the face of recalcitrant reality, we can produce some ad hoc (and *ad hominen*) arguments that "save the phenomena" and our theoretical constructs by preserving their internal coherence. In inventing more and more sophisticated theoretical constructs, which have to pass the criterion of internal coherence, we remove ourselves further away from what is given and what reality is like. For a philosopher of Hartmann's integrity, however, that is simply unacceptable. Our quest is not for certainty but for reality as it is, in all of its mind-boggling and wondrous inconsistencies and tensions.

Philosophers like Gadamer praise Hartmann's refusal to follow abstract theoretical constructs, but criticize him from a different perspective. Gadamer does not complain about Hartmann's shrinking of the radius of rationality; he thinks that its limits are far narrower than Hartmann asserts. More importantly, he charges that Hartmann misses some essential features of the nature of human rationality. Hartmann wants to eliminate the inaccuracies of the past once and forever and approaches philosophical problems from a neutral point of view, from "this side of idealism and realism." He imagines that we can practice philosophy, or any kind of thinking, with a minimum of metaphysics, and that there are eternal philosophical problems. Gadamer argues that his one-time teacher is not just old-fashioned, but misguided. True, human rationality is embodied in emotions, intuitions, and human expectations. Hartmann fails to recognize, however, that it is also embodied in *social* practices, with all of their accompanying prejudices. This is not a reason for concern, proclaims Gadamer, for "prejudices are conditions of understanding." It is high time to liberate ourselves not from the prejudices of the past, but from our "prejudice against prejudice."⁶

Hartmann rejects the Aristotelian "metaphysics of realms" (ontology, cosmology, theology, psychology), as well as the old deductive and speculative metaphysics. He attempts to develop new ways of ontology based on the

⁶ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd edn, trans. J. Weinsheimer and D. G. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 1993), 277. Scheler voices a similar criticism of Hartmann in the Preface for the third edition of his *Formalism in Ethics*, xxx-xxx1.

“history of problems.” In every ontological problem we consider, Hartmann insists, we need to eliminate its historically conditioned elements and focus on its essential aspects. If there are prejudices incorporated in our thinking, then we have to identify and correct them. He never hesitates to point out both worthy insights and blinding mistakes in his philosophical predecessors. That is why we study the history of ideas and the history of philosophy so carefully—with an open and sympathetic, yet objectively oriented and critical mind.

Gadamer replies that the core of Hartmann’s naïve orientation is his belief in some independently existing “history of problems.” Insofar as problems are different from questions, they are always conditioned by the historical circumstances and the dialectic of question and answer. There are no such things as independently existing problems, just as there is no “history of problems.” This is a pure abstraction, an invention of the mind unsuccessfully attempting to detach itself from the historical currents that shape the events of the world and our thinking about them. In Gadamer’s words,

It is typical of the embarrassment of philosophical consciousness when faced with historicism that it took flight into an abstraction, the concept of the “problem,” and saw no problem about the manner in which problems actually “exist.” Neo-Kantian history of problems is a bastard of historicism. Critiquing the concept of the problem by appealing to a logic of question and answer must destroy the illusion that problems exist like stars in the sky.⁷

The main thrust of Gadamer’s *Truth and Method* is that there is a different concept of truth in natural and human sciences; thus the method of searching for truth must also be correspondingly different. According to Gadamer, Hartmann’s “new ways of ontology” and his insistence on perennial philosophical problems resemble the methodological approach of natural sciences too closely. Hartmann completely ignores the hermeneutical method of question and answer, the only appropriate method for philosophical thinking and human sciences.

We can point out a variety of things in Hartmann’s defense. Ontological questions do resemble natural science far more than they resemble, say, literary criticism of some text, or sociohistorical analysis of some event. If the question of being as being makes sense at all, it can serve as an example

⁷ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 377.

of the perennial problem which has nothing to do with the logic of question and answer. The case is analogous for the problem of the relationship of ontological and epistemological categories and, perhaps the greatest problem of all, the relationship of the mind and real world. Just as there are questions dealing with the nature of humanity, which remain essentially the same regardless of the social context in which they are raised, there are also ontological questions regarding the nature and structure of being.

These ontological questions about “the world such as it actually is” are more basic than both the logic of natural sciences and the hermeneutical logic advocated by the historically oriented and postmodernist philosophers. Just as science cannot tell us what the fundamental categories of being are, but, instead, must take them over from ontology, neither can human sciences determine their own categories without the help of a timelessly considered ontology. We must therefore return to ontology because (i) all fundamental metaphysical questions are ontological in nature, and because (ii) the content of these questions is not an accidental or arbitrary product of social practice; such questions are rooted in the eternal puzzlement at the world and its wonders.⁸

Gadamer’s logic of questions and answers has a role to play not where he sees it, but at a different point of philosophical inquiry. One of the vices of the intellectualism is that it constantly strives toward rational closure of any inquiry, a definitive answer to any question. Hartmann’s ontology of the conflicting being and the dialectic of antinomies show how groundless such expectations are. Even in the field in which we hope for some definitive results, the field of categorial analysis, our thinking leads us from one set of problems to further and more complex problems. Our most systematic and rigorous thinking leads us toward the discovery of new conflicts, antinomies, and wonders. Wonder is thus not only the initiator of philosophical thinking and analysis, but also its end product. Philosophy begins with our wonder at the complexity and beauty of the world and deepens that wonder and the sense of its appreciation even further. Despite our intellectualistic dream of the conclusive overcoming of the opposites in their grand synthesis, the cycle never ends.

In Hartmann’s view, the vast majority of post-Hegelian philosophers (Gadamer included) turn against ontology because of the “correlativistic” mistake.⁹ They place the mind, whether understood in the individual or

⁸ See Hartmann, *Zur Grundlegung der Ontologie*, Introduction, section 14, 13–15. See also Hartmann, *Der Aufbau der realen Welt*, v–x.

⁹ See Hartmann, *Zur Grundlegung der Ontologie*, sections 10, 11, and 13 of the Introduction, and also ch. 23a, 144–5 and ch. 26c, 161–2.

the social way, as it were between the cognizing subject and the world to be cognized. They then assume that, in order to have cognition, the mind must correlate between them. The mind becomes the ultimate judge of what there is, and of what kind of properties and limits that being may have.

Hartmann's view is that, just because our thinking about something is a product of consciousness, the object we think about does not thereby become mind-dependent. The (cor)relation between a subject and an object does not turn the object into something mental. In analogy to Berkeley's "*esse est percipi*," we can say that the correlativistic argument postulates that "to be is to be thought about."

We should not confuse the way of thinking and the conditions of experience on the one hand, with what we are thinking about and the objects of experience on the other. In this type of fallacy, the fascination with the *intentio obliqua* becomes the prison of the inquiring mind. For Hartmann, the price of being entrapped in our minds is too high: if only internal (or "narrative") coherence matters, we then sacrifice any robust notion of truth and knowledge. If, by contrast, we turn back to *intentio recta*, as ontology must do, this entrapping illusion disappears: being is what it is, regardless of what anyone thinks and how much one knows about it.

The way toward rediscovery of the real is hence open. And if in this process we stumble upon irresolvable antinomies and find out that being is not as harmonious as we thought, so be it. If reality is more recalcitrant to our logical constraints than we anticipated, let us loosen-up our logical principles and find "logic" that corresponds to the resistance of the real. Why continue to imitate the proverbial fishermen who are more preoccupied with their nets than the fish they are supposed to catch in them? If philosophy is to remain faithful to its original calling, why not repudiate the correlativistic way of thinking, assisted by untenable intellectualistic expectations, and return to reality to find out what it really is?

In ordering ourselves toward the world as it is, we should also not forget that, in this first part of the book, we have mostly discussed only one way of being: real being. We have left untouched the whole realm of values, which belongs to ideal being. Of the various kinds of values, Hartmann focuses on two: moral and aesthetic. His books discussing these values are not an afterthought for Hartmann, or a desire to complete a philosophical system. From the initial outlines of his ontological program, Hartmann emphasizes the role of moral and aesthetic values. His book on moral values, *Ethics*, appeared in 1926, before any major work on ontology in a narrow sense. Similarly, his first paper on aesthetics, presented at the

World Congress of Philosophy, also in 1926, unmistakably shows the outlines of an aesthetics he developed two decades later.¹⁰

If Hartmann is right, ethics and aesthetics do not stand opposed to ontology; rather, they are its extension into the realm of ideal being. Ethics and aesthetics are based on the same fundamental insight as ontology of real being: conflicts lie in the nature of being. Thinking specifically about ethics, Hartmann emphasizes that “the range of application of this insight is immeasurable.”¹¹ What is even more important, the application of this insight leads Hartmann to fascinating discoveries in the realms of moral and aesthetic values. It also guides him toward unexpected realizations with regard to what it means to be a human being and live a meaningful life.

As Will Durant said, philosophy “is an attempt to coordinate the real in the light of the ideal.” We are yet to see what it means in the case of Hartmann’s philosophy so heavily focused on being—and values.

¹⁰ Nicolai Hartmann, “Über die Stellung der ästhetischen Werte im Reich der Werte überhaupt,” in Edgar Sheffield Brighter (ed.), *Proceedings of the Sixth International Congress of Philosophy Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1926* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1927), 428–36.

¹¹ Hartmann, “Wie ist kritische Ontologie möglich?” 312.

Part II

Values

“Moral life is life in the midst of conflicts.”

Hartmann

II.1

Nature of Values

Hartmann's ontology can be compared to a submarine exploration of the depths of the ocean. His analysis of values, by contrast, takes a bird's eye view. When he speaks about the "starry heavens" of values, this is more than just a metaphor. Values are part of ideal being that seems to float above daily life and events taking place in it. There are so many values that look to an unaccustomed eye as if randomly spread over the heavenly vault. A trained eye will, however, recognize the constellations of values and some individual "stars." Where an ignorant person will see temporary distraction or useless curiosity, an experienced traveler will use the "stars" to navigate through the stormy waters of life.

Arendt argues that what characterizes our age is an extreme degree of thoughtlessness. Hartmann need not disagree with this estimate. Nevertheless, he puts the emphasis on modern man's blindness for values. What astonishes Hartmann is:

the narrowness of the sense of value, petty-mindedness, a lack of appreciation of the comprehensible extent of the real. For most persons the limit of life's narrowest interests, of the most positive egoistic relations, dictated by the stress of the moment, is at the same time the limit of their moral universe. Their life is a cramped, diminished life, a shriveled, distorted caricature of humanity.¹

We usually blame our difficulties on bad luck and unfortunate social, economic, or political circumstances. According to Hartmann,

The tragedy of man is that of one who, sitting at a well-laden table, is hungry but who will not reach out his hand, because he does not see what is before him. For the real world is inexhaustible in abundance,

¹ Hartmann, *Ethik*, Introduction, sec. 5 [I, 38]. See also *Ethik*, ch. 41c [II, 210].

actual life is saturated and overflows with values, and when we lay hold of it we find it replete with wonder and grandeur.²

We sense right away that in the exploration of values Hartmann comes closer not only to the primal sense of wonder, which inspires us toward philosophical thinking, but also to the weighty questions of human existence. Perhaps we do not need to know much about being as being, or about the categories characterizing some strata of reality, for lack of that knowledge would not cripple our humanity. It is different with values. They seem to connect us right away with the question of meaning: of existence in general, and of human existence in particular. Yet we must be careful and double-check our impressions. For just as ontology lies some distance from the practical affairs of ordinary man, so does the realm of values. If the starry heavens towering above us hold the key to the full development of our humanity, we need to understand not only how values impact us, but also what their nature is.

Nietzsche famously proclaims that the task of a philosopher is “to solve the problem of value and define the rank order of values.”³ Values seem to be so important for us all, philosophers or nonphilosophers, but when we look back at the history of philosophy it is easy to see that axiology, or theory of value, is the least developed of all philosophical disciplines. In fact, even the term “value” is of relatively recent origin. Ancient and medieval philosophers do not use it at all. Arendt traces the shift that occurred in the use of that concept from the early modern philosophers, particularly Locke, to our present days. Locke still recognizes “the *intrinsic* natural worth of anything,” which is an objective quality of things themselves, “outside the will of the individual purchaser or seller.” From the conception of the “intrinsic worth” the development of economy leads toward the “*use value*,” which is of great significance for the advancement of utilitarianism and the expansion of modern capitalism. The subsequent advance of commercial society leads to the further relativization of value: from the use value to the *exchange value* determined by the market.⁴

The history of Western philosophy, together with the overarching history of the West, is the history of arguments about values. There is hardly another topic that is surrounded by so much disagreement and confusion.

² Hartmann, *Ethik*, Introduction, sec. 5 [I, 39].

³ Quoted from Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Hermeneutics, Religion, and Ethics*, trans. J. Weinsheimer (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), 69. See chapters 2, 4, and 7 of the cited work for Gadamer’s criticism of Hartmann’s understanding of values and, more generally, of “Hartmann’s rich and brilliant book on ethics” (107).

⁴ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 164–6.

From ancient times, the focus has been on finding the highest or ultimate value of human life standing on the top of the pyramid of other values. A rough division of the major attempts at grasping such an ultimate value separates them into hedonistic and anti-hedonistic views. The hedonistic views differ with regard to whether the ultimate value is pleasure-based, or something more comprehensive and expressed in terms of contentment. The anti-hedonistic views range from those regarding knowledge, truth, beauty, virtue, harmony, love, friendship, justice, or freedom as the highest good. Nor is there any agreement as to whether there is a strict pyramid of values, all-arching toward one highest value, or, instead, a genuine pluralism, something like a network of independent and irreducible values.

There are also related confusions regarding the function, ontological status, absoluteness, and objectivity of values. One of the thinkers who have made great impact on our understanding of these issues in the twentieth century, Isaiah Berlin, maintains that, “values are created by men in their struggle to master themselves, their society and natural world. Values, therefore, [are] historical, relative to the cultures that engendered them and contradictory, since human nature itself is contradictory.”⁵

Hartmann contests Berlin’s views on virtually every point. It is misleading to say that values deal with *mastering* ourselves, our society, and the natural world. While this is accepted as one of the usually undisputed pillars of the Western worldview, the primary function of values does not concern any form of mastering. Values deal with guidance and orientation. Like the stars above, they help us find our way through reality by directing us toward the worthy objects of devotion and pursuit. Hartmann holds that the proper function of values is “*Sinngebung*”—they give sense and meaning, they recommend what is to be esteemed and what not. Values are not related to mastery over ourselves, or of our social and natural world. They are related to our aspirations. As spiritual beings, we strive toward what is great and superior. We strive toward them from the bottom of our nature, and this Hartmann considers to be the most beautiful feature of humanity.

One point of agreement between Hartmann and Berlin is their view that values cannot be derived from facts about human nature. Berlin does a masterful job in showing how the philosophers of the Enlightenment assume that all human beings want the same things and that those things are not in conflict. On the basis of such rationalistic optimism, they believe that if people are freed from ignorance and prejudices, as well as old customs

⁵ Quoted from Michael Inghatoff, *Isaiah Berlin: A Life* (New York: Henry Holt, 1998), 201–2.

and superstitions, we could come up with definitive answers to all questions and just solutions to all problems. Berlin exposes the naiveté of such expectations and swings toward the Romantic emphasis of cultural variety and historicism. This criticism of the Enlightenment seduces him to accept the following dilemma: values are either derived from facts about human nature, or they are products of historically and culturally conditioned human beings, the products of the objective spirit of one time and place.

Hartmann's ontology enables him to see a third option: values are independent of persons. We do not create values, nor do values change as a result of our insights. Ontologically speaking, Berlin is wrong to believe that values exist as an aspect of the objective spirit. They exist on their own in the realm of ideal being, independently on whether we recognize them and follow their "ought to be," their recommendations. How we realize values and which of them we choose to embrace, if we do at all, is relative to us, to our individual, cultural, and historical circumstances. Nevertheless, values themselves are absolute.

Since the ontological status of values is such a controversial issue, let us also compare Hartmann's view with that of Karl Popper. In order to distinguish the ontological status of values from those of physical objects (such as chairs and tables, which populate the "first world") and subjective experiences (psychological processes, which reside in the "second world"), Popper argues that, together with theories, arguments, problems, and books, values exist in the "third world." Although Popper regards this realm as "essentially the product of the human mind," the objects of the "third world" have "their own inherent or autonomous laws," which makes the inmates of this world real: "more or less as real as tables and chairs."⁶

If Hartmann is right, Popper's view of values is also based on an ontological oversight. Like Berlin, Popper does not distinguish between real and ideal being. Popper correctly realizes that the ontological status of values is different from that of inanimate objects, organic being, and even the products of consciousness. He does not understand the peculiarities of the world of spirit, however, together with its distinctions of the personal, objective, and objectified spirit. In Hartmann's terminology, Popper locates values in the objectified spirit. Yet values do not "reside" in any stratum of real being but in ideal being. They are "essences," in Scheler's phenomenological sense of the word. Values are not formal essences, like the principles and categories of logic, but material essences. Like all essences, they can be discerned by an a priori insight. We do not learn

⁶ Karl Popper, *Unended Quest: An Intellectual Autobiography* (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1976), 148.

what is of value by induction from experience; experience can only deal with the actualization of a value, however perfect or imperfect, complete or incomplete that actualization may be. Values themselves are not only independent of things we experience as valuable, but are their prerequisites: things are valuable only through a relation to values themselves.

Hartmann's view of the ideal existence of values resembles Platonic Ideas, but it is important not to overlook the differences between the two approaches. Platonic Ideas are supposed to be the categories of existence, and as such apply to the real world. Insofar as values are also the categories of existence, in a consistently Platonic world, truly real beings and ideal values coincide: real overlaps with ideal. Hartmann deviates from this view for two reasons. On the one hand, ontology is "stronger" than axiology. On the other, the Platonic stand diminishes the autonomy of values, by equating values with existing beings and by detaching values from man's free choice.

Such confusions regarding the proper realms of ontology and axiology are not accidental. They stem from our oversight that, as beings, values stand under the same laws that Hartmann formulates in his ontology. These laws are:

1. The law of stratification and foundation.
2. The law of height and strength.
3. The law of opposition and complementation.

The first of these laws deals with the stratification of being, which Hartmann articulates in terms of (i) the recurrence of the categories of the lower strata in higher layers, (ii) their transformation in the higher strata, (iii) the novelty that is thereby introduced, and (iv) the distance between the strata. The "strata" of values are different than the strata of real being. In the case of values, the only "strata" we can talk about are the mutually irreducible kinds of values. This is the foundation of Hartmann's value pluralism, according to which there are (i) goods as values, (ii) values of the pleasant, (iii) vital values, (iv) cognitive values, (v) moral values, and (vi) aesthetic values.⁷

While moral values are always the *values of intention* (and as such are the conditioned values that inhere in the person), vital values, "goods as values," and values of the pleasant are the *intended values* (and as such are the conditioning values). The conditioning values can overlap, but we can

⁷ See Hartmann, *Ästhetik*, ch. 27, 329–42; and *Ethik*, chs 35–6 [II, 125–54].

still outline their borders. Vital values involve values such as health, energy level and life enthusiasm. Values of the pleasant and goods as values are regularly mistakenly grouped together, for example when the value of what is pleasant is attributed to an object that leads us to experience pleasure.

Hartmann is not always clear about what he considers under the rubric of “goods as values.” They all have in common that they are good *for* someone (even if that someone is not aware of it), but then they branch in diverse directions. In *Aesthetics*, for example, he speaks about the most elementary goods, such as air, soil, light, and water. In *Ethics*, by contrast, his focus is on two other groups of goods as values. One of them is attached to the objective state of affairs, thus “situational values,” and they include existence, situation, power, happiness, and more specific goods, such as property, possession, law, education, and literature. The other kind of goods as values are attached to a subject, and Hartmann there distinguishes life, consciousness, activity, suffering, strength, freedom of the will, foresight, and purposive efficacy.

Like Scheler, Hartmann considers cognitive, moral, and aesthetic values as *spiritual* values. One way to distinguish among spiritual values is by looking at the carrier of value. In the case of moral values, it is always a human being as a person. For cognitive values, the carrier is not man, neither as a person, nor as a cognizer. Man is neither true nor false, but his judgment is. Thus, the proper carrier of cognitive values is a cognitive judgment. In the case of aesthetic values, the carrier again is not man; it does not matter whether he is beautiful or ugly. The carrier of an aesthetic value is an individual aesthetic object.

Unlike Scheler, Hartmann does not consider the values of the holy (or religious values), because they depend on the existence of God, which can neither be rationally established nor is it phenomenologically given.

The mutual relation of these kinds of values is that of conditioning, not of founding (as in ontology of real being). In the conditioning relation, unlike the stratification proper, when the conditioned value is actualized, the conditioning value is not necessarily actualized with it. With regard to our love for another person, for instance, the question is not whether the service rendered to another person with such love is successful or not, that is, whether the intended situation becomes actual or not. The relevant issue is only whether it is sincerely undertaken. The conditioned value is always higher than the value conditioning it.

The second law deals with the height and strength of values. Philosophers have always searched for one definitive scale of values, something analogous to “the great chain of being” in ontology. On Scheler’s view, which attempts to account both for an ideal of one unified scale and

the apparent disagreements concerning what that scale is, “the hierarchy of values is itself absolutely invariable, while the order of preference in history is itself variable.”⁸

One of Hartmann’s greatest contributions to our understanding of values is to show that there cannot be such a scale. There are many scales of values of which the two are the most important: the strength and the height of values. They work in an inverse ratio: the lowest values are the strongest, and the highest values are the weakest. In Hartmann’s view, the stronger a value, the more blameworthy is its absence but the less praiseworthy is its presence. By contrast, the higher a value, the more commendable is its attainment and the less culpable is its absence: “A threat to life and limb is the gravest threat; but mere life is not on that account the highest good.”⁹ More generally, “Evidence of strength is found in the seriousness of the offence against a value, while height is known by the meritoriousness of fulfillment.”¹⁰

The third law concerns the opposition and complementary relationships of various values. In *Ethics*, Hartmann analyzes over 40 different values. For every positive value, there is an opposing negative value (as well as the neutral point, or the point of indifference). The basic situation in any value conflict is not that between one positive value and its counterpart negative value, but that between one positive value and another positive value (or one negative value against another negative value). Such conflicts abound; we constantly and unavoidably find ourselves in the middle of them. What is more, no guiltless resolution of such conflicts is possible: one of the conflicting values must be violated.

The incompatibilities of values arise because some opposing values cannot be fully realized in the same life situations. One example of such an opposition is between brotherly love (as championed by Tolstoy, for example) and love of the remote (as advocated by Nietzsche). One value urges the development of brotherhood and Christian compassion toward those near us, while the other directs us to devote an even greater attention to those who are remote, not just in space but even in time (as our responsibility toward the future generations).

Another, even more serious type of conflict emerges because values themselves are antithetical; for instance, brotherly love and justice. The sharpest of such conflicts present the “antinomies of values.” As is the

⁸ Max Scheler, *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Values*, trans. M. S. Frings and R. L. Funk (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 106.

⁹ Hartmann, *Ethik*, ch. 43e [II, 453].

¹⁰ Hartmann, *Ethik*, ch. 43d [II, 451].

case in ontology, in axiology there are also genuine value antinomies and they are rationally insolvable. Systematic as he is in everything, Hartmann distinguishes such antinomies with regard to their (i) modality and (ii) relation, as well as (iii) the quantity, and (iv) the quality of values. More specifically, he analyzes the antinomical conflicts between freedom and necessity (“ought”), attainment and attainability, the intended value and the value of intention, the communal and the individual, equality and inequality, the breadth versus the height of development, activity and inertia, simplicity and complexity, harmony and conflict, and so on.

While Berlin laments that the existence of the antinomies of values makes human life tragic,¹¹ Hartmann realizes that the presence of antinomical tensions in the realm of values is by itself something valuable. Such tensions and conflicts keep our discernment and the feeling of value alive. Unlike Plato and Aristotle, who battle against our ignorance and misconceptions, Hartmann is more concerned about the narrowness of our value-horizon. We sleepwalk through life, oblivious to its complexity, depth, and richness. The antinomies of values awaken our value-feeling and value-intuition, and convey to us a new sense of wonder, amazement, and reverence for the world laden with values.

The third law concerns not only the opposition, but also the complementary relationship of various forms of being. In the realm of real being, this is of crucial importance because the unity of real beings is regularly the unity of heterogeneous elements. This relation of complementarity is no less important in the realm of values. Some values, like trust and trustworthiness, faith and fidelity, kindness and gratitude, naturally go together. The more interesting cases are those of complementarity of different kinds of values. Material goods, for example, are complementary with the person’s capacity to enjoy such goods (health, consciousness, sense of appreciation). The lower goods, such as material goods, find their fulfillment only in higher values: material wealth is not of much value when a person is sick, or incapable of appreciating luxuries of life.

The most interesting cases of the synthesis of values are those where two values stand clearly opposed to each other. Justice and brotherly love stand in such contrast, as do pride and humility, egoism and altruism, and many others. Our longing for this synthesis is due to two factors. First, no value can be actualized on its own, but always in clusters with other values. Artificially isolated values and one-sided values, even those that are the

¹¹ Isaiah Berlin, *The Proper Study of Mankind: An Anthology of Essays*, ed. H. Hardy and R. Hausher (London: Chatto & Windus, 1997), 239.

highest, are dangerous: so isolated and overemphasized, they tend to lead toward extremes and fanaticism. Second, our longing for such a synthesis is due to the fact that in all actual cases of conflict our conduct cannot fail to reach a certain unity. The synthesis thus concerns not the relation among antagonistic values themselves, but their actualization. Hartmann calls this idea a “necessary postulate of ethics” and elaborates it in the following way:

Only a sense of justice which is at the same time loving, only a brotherly love which also considers the far distant, only a pride which would likewise be humble, could be valid as an ideal for moral conduct. But insofar as the antithetic of values, with its gradations, permeates the whole realm, it follows that in general no isolated values exist for themselves, that rather does every value reach true fulfillment only in its synthesis with others—and indeed finally only in idea, only in its synthesis with all.¹²

In Kant’s terminology, the synthesis of all values, including those that are antithetical, is not a constitutive but a regulative principle of axiology. What has yet to be seen is what is gained if such a synthesis is possible, and what is lost if it is not.

¹² Hartmann, *Ethik*, ch. 41g [II, 425].

II.2

Moral Values in General

Why does Hartmann entitle his book “Ethics” rather than “A Theory of Value”?

Hartmann is aware of Kant’s three fundamental questions of philosophy: (i) What can we know? (ii) What ought we to do? and (iii) What may we hope? He recognizes that the second question suggests that ethics aims at more than a merely cognitive grasp of reality, “and yet at less than what hope yearns for.” This fundamental question shows why ethics is primarily a practical rather than a theoretical enterprise and also locates ethics “between the hard realities of life and the hovering ideals of the visionary.”¹

Taken by itself, the question “What ought we to do?” does not show the full range of the ethical realm. It only focuses this realm into one culminating and most visible point, that of practical interest. Underlying the question dealing with the necessity and actuality of action, however, is one broader and deeper requirement: in order to be moral beings, we need to participate in the fullness of life, to be open and receptive to everything that has meaning and value. Ethics cannot tell us what to do in every practical situation, nor can it reduce us to mere mechanical executioners of the moral law. Put differently, taken by itself, ethics cannot answer the question that it sets as its primary concern. The ethics of conduct must be part of a broader set of issues dealing with the nature of humanity and the continuous development of every personality. The question “What ought we to do?” always presupposes the concerns about who we are and what we are trying to become. Our understanding of what is valuable in life precedes and conditions the question of what specific action to undertake. Put more broadly, just as ontology precedes and conditions axiology, axiology precedes and conditions ethics.

Hartmann develops this insight not just in terms of the gap between “to be” and “ought to be,” but also in terms of the distinction between “ought

¹ Both quotes are from Hartmann, *Ethik*, Introduction, sec. 1 [I, 27].

to be” and “ought to do.” Unlike ontological categories, values cannot determine existent beings. They can only determine what they ideally ought to be. What “ought to be” has its ideal value regardless of whether anything in the real world has been or will be in accord with it. Nevertheless, the “ought” signifies a direction toward something. For example, universal peace among nations is in itself something valuable; it is something that gives direction to our strivings, attitudes, and behaviors. This does not imply, however, that a single individual, or a single nation, ought to bring peace. The “ought to be” is different from the “ought to do.” In Hartmann’s words, “I ought to do what ought to be, insofar as it ‘is’ not, and insofar as to make it actual is in my power. This double ‘insofar’ separates these two kinds of ought.”²

Hartmann bridges the fracture between the two kinds of “ought” by introducing yet another “ought”: the “positive ought to be.” The real is indifferent toward the ideal, but not the other way around. The ideal has a tendency to transcend its own sphere, irrespective of the possibility of its realization. The positive ought to be “occurs where the ideal finds itself in opposition to reality, where the self-existent values are unreal.”³

The positive ought to be brings the realms of the ontological, axiological, and ethical together, and their meeting point is a conscious subject. Such a subject can feel the resistance of reality and also what is missing from that reality. Consciousness leads us to realize not only what is, but also what is not and what could be. The positive ought to be is the crossroad point between the awareness of what the situation is and what it allows to happen, and of what it ideally could and should become. “The positive ought to be does not lie within the ideal realm. It issues thence, but extends itself into the real; and insofar as it is a determining factor there, its activity is a real creating, a bringing forth.”⁴ As a subject, a human being has a peculiar position in the cosmos. He “stands midway between good and evil, being wholly neither, participating in both. The Platonic image of Eros in its relation to the eternal Ideas is the image of man in his relation to the ethical values—to the mode of Being of the moral essence, as it exists in the real world.”⁵

In Part III, we shall return to the interrelationship of these different spheres. Let us now focus on the nature of moral values. According to Hartmann, such values do not and cannot stand alone. In every type of moral action, besides strictly moral values, that is, the values that characterize

² Hartmann, *Ethik*, ch. 18a [I, 248].

³ Hartmann, *Ethik*, ch. 18b [I, 249].

⁴ Hartmann, *Ethik*, ch. 19a [I, 255].

⁵ Hartmann, *Ethik*, ch. 18c [I, 251–2].

persons as free agents, the values that characterize things and situations are also involved. In order to be truthful, for example, a person must be alive. That, however, does not make life a moral value, while truthfulness clearly is one. Life is *a* good but not *the* good. The value of life is not moral but it is morally relevant.

Hartmann further distinguishes between moral values and another subset of goods as values, which he calls “situational values” and which deal with the goals of our actions. Like all other goods as values, situational values are morally relevant but not moral values themselves. Our actions always aim at something, at the realization of certain values in the situations in which we find ourselves. This does not make our aims, goals, or ends the carriers of morality, as is so frequently assumed. Valuable things can come into existence without any intention being directed toward them, yet it is precisely this intention that makes a certain value moral. Moral values are the values of intention, not intended values. As Hartmann formulates it,

Moral qualities characterize a person’s conduct, but not the object of the intention in which his conduct subsists. According to Scheler’s phrase, [moral values] appear “on the back of the deed,” but not in the goal it aims at. The ethics of ends involves a fundamental misunderstanding of moral values, in its false identification of these with the value of the situation striven for.⁶

It is equally wrong to identify moral values with means. Our actions frequently aim at something we consider useful for others or ourselves. This, however, does not make usefulness a self-sufficient (or autonomous) value, a moral value on its own account. By its nature, usefulness can only be a value of means to something deemed to be valuable in itself. Moral values are not relative to any “for.” Honesty of a person A can be of value for person B. Yet the moral value of honesty of person A does not in any way depend on whether B (or anyone else) recognizes or appreciates the honesty of A.

The distinction of means and ends is far less important for ethics than commonly assumed among ethicists. The discrepancy between “is” and “ought” is another example of a distinction not as central as generally regarded. With his understanding of values as ideal beings, Hartmann does not have to deal with the question of how an “ought” can (if at all) be derived from an “is”; this is a misguided question because no “ought” has

⁶ Hartmann, *Ethik*, ch. 27a [II, 31]. For Hartmann’s criticism of teleological ethics, see his *Teleologisches Denken* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1950).

to be derived from any “is.” They are ontologically distinct. The project of morality is to find a way to apply the “ought” existing in the realm of ideal being to a concrete life situation. That is, the project is to actualize moral values. The real issue in ethics is not how to derive an “ought” from an “is” but which of the values to apply to the specific situation. What diverts our will from the “ought” is the “ought” itself, for values are so many.

In clearing the ground toward our proper understanding of moral values, Hartmann does not spare the widespread belief that happiness is the highest moral value and the ultimate end of life. He considers happiness not to be a moral value at all, much less the highest moral value. Happiness is one of the values of the good. Together with pleasure, with which it is frequently mistakenly identified, happiness is a cloak for other, higher values, moral values included.

Following Aristotle, Hartmann distinguishes between the “objective” and the “subjective” preconditions of happiness. Objectively, happiness depends on favorable external circumstances, on lucky coincidences, or good destiny. Taken in this sense, happiness is what is wanted, a situational value. Considered in the subjective sense, happiness is closer to moral values because it deals with a person’s capacity for the appreciation of life. It then relates to the person’s ability to feel pleasure, satisfaction, joy, or blessedness. These two sides of happiness can be fully independent of each other and one can exist without the other.

Hartmann’s discussion of happiness becomes more original when he warns us of the dangers associated with happiness. One of them is that we attempt to pursue happiness as a direct goal, while happiness, in fact, cannot be attained in such a manner. Happiness only comes from where one does not expect it; it occurs when we are not looking for it.

Hartmann’s observation of the second danger associated with happiness is even more interesting. People “spoiled” by happiness become shallow and narrow-minded for other higher values. He writes, “A man can bear only a limited measure of happiness without sinking morally; even in happiness there lurks a hidden disvalue. Indeed, in no other value is this limiting phenomenon so paradoxical as in happiness.”⁷

It is fascinating that Hartmann contrasts the value of happiness with the value of suffering. All hedonistic forms of ethics identify suffering with pain and consider it as an exemplar of evil. The ancient Greeks attached no special value to suffering. Only Christianity takes a different attitude toward it, and distinctly recognizes the elevating and liberating effects of suffering. Instead of associating it with evil and considering it a

⁷ Hartmann, *Ethik*, ch. 37e [II, 161].

weakness, Christianity bestows a special dignity on suffering and treats it as a mysterious power.

Christianity tends to overlook that suffering is primarily a negative value, but Hartmann reminds us that suffering, as such, is undesirable. He also recognizes the indisputable value of suffering when contrasted to the incapacity to suffer. Such incapacity can lead to numbness and dehumanization, as beautifully portrayed in Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*. Hartmann understands this incapacity in terms of the impossibility to bear grief and misfortune, which leads people to collapse under the weight of suffering: "When a dire misfortune has passed away, it leaves the man who is incapable of suffering broken, morally warped, disfigured, weakened; he can no longer stand up, he has been damaged in his fundamental worth."⁸

Those who have the capacity for suffering can be strengthened by it. Their power of endurance, their moral being and their humanity grow through such suffering: "Suffering is the energy-test of a moral being, the load-test of his elasticity."⁹ The capacity to suffer sharpens our moral feeling and intuition. It enables us to recognize the values that were previously hidden from us. Suffering is the "educator" of values.

There is nothing pathological or absurd in the willingness to suffer for a higher goal. Such a goal may be individual or social, but the will to suffer for love's sake, or rather for a person who is loved, is even deeper. In a loving suffering for another person there is an unmistakable participation in something larger than one's own personality. This suffering creates a community with another person, which is of great value for our moral life.

The deepened capacity for suffering leads indirectly to the enhancement of our capacity for happiness. Although we take suffering to be the opposite of happiness, suffering actually deepens our appreciation of happiness. "The quiet, firm nature of the tried soul does not crave for pleasure and happiness. He does not care for it. And just for that reason—according to the law of happiness—it comes to him."¹⁰

Many of our confusions about ethics stem from the fact that we neither clearly understand which values we can meaningfully strive toward, nor which moral values can be actualized through striving. Even more fundamental is that these confusions are due to our insufficient understanding of what distinguishes moral values in the strict sense from

⁸ Hartmann, *Ethik*, ch. 36d [II, 139].

⁹ Hartmann, *Ethik*, ch. 36d [II, 139].

¹⁰ Hartmann, *Ethik*, ch. 36d [II, 141].

those values that are indispensable for the actualization of moral values but which themselves are not moral. Let us then follow Hartmann's own summary of the nature of moral values, based primarily on Chapter 27 of his *Aesthetics*.

1. There is no atomism of values. Although we can consider them individually, all values are essentially connected with other values and form clusters of values. Moral values are no exception to this rule.
2. The carriers of moral values are not material goods but exclusively persons, or acts, attitudes, behavior, and intentions of persons. (This is why moral values are spiritual values). Only that behavior which is not forced but free and could have been different can have moral value.
3. Moral values are not relative toward any "for," as goods as values are. Goods as values are good for those to whom they belong, or whom they serve (e.g. values such as air, soil, light, water). Moral values (such as honesty, brotherly love, and justice) are good independently of whether anyone recognizes or appreciates them.
4. Moral values are tied to living beings not only as the carriers of such values but also as their objects. Moral values and moral behavior deal directly or indirectly not only with other spiritual beings, but also with all living beings.
5. In every moral action, two kinds of values are always present: the value of intention (or moral values) and the intended value (goods as values, situational values).
6. The actualization of moral values is founded on goods as values. Nevertheless, moral values are autonomous. They do not have to contain their conditioning values (goods as values) as their elements, just as in the case of the ontological strata of real being; the conditioning (thus lower) value is not repeated in the conditioned (thus higher) value.
7. Autonomous values cannot be derived from or reduced to anything else. If they exist, they are absolute values.
8. We have no other criterion for whether a certain value is autonomous but our feeling of value. Although such feeling of value is differently developed in various individuals and cultures, which is why it appears that there are many "morals," when autonomous values exist, they are always absolute.

We are now in a better position to answer our initial question dealing with the title of Hartmann's work. His book presents an incredible array of values, which are subtly discriminated and exhaustively contrasted.

This is so because Hartmann understands the central project of ethics as a systematic analysis of the objective contents of moral claims and commandments. Such analysis must also involve the mutual relationships of values underlying these claims and commandments. At the most obvious level, Hartmann attempts to connect the already undertaken projects by Kant and Nietzsche. In the apriority of the moral law, Hartmann recognizes a well-considered and unified knowledge of the absoluteness of genuine ethical standards and values. Kant lacks the concrete perception and the breadth of sympathy that would have given this knowledge full recognition. This missing link is supplied by Nietzsche (and later Scheler), who recognizes that we have never fully grasped what good and evil are, and who redirects our attention to the fascinating richness of the moral world. In combining Kant and Nietzsche, Hartmann remains truthful to his central philosophical intention to fuse organically what appear to be heterogeneous and conflicting factors. He remains equally faithful to his fundamental conviction that the purpose of philosophical analysis is the Socratic midwifery of our consciousness, which for Hartmann “signifies a new kind of love for the task in hand, a new devotion, a new reverence for what is great.”¹¹

Just as we need a new way of ontology, so we analogously need a new way of ethics. The dependence of the question: What ought we to do? on the question: What ought we to value? shows that this new ethics presupposes an axiology. In new ethics, as in new ontology, the most important accomplishment is not the results and the definitive solutions of all the problems we may face. The essence of the new ethical approach, of the attempt to combine rationality and sensitivity, is a renewed sense of wonder. Hartmann expresses it movingly when he says:

The new ethics also has once more the courage to face the whole metaphysical difficulty of the problems which arise out of the consciousness of the eternally marvelous and unmastered. Once again the primal passion of philosophy has become its attitude—the Socratic pathos of wonder.¹²

¹¹ Hartmann, *Ethik*, Introduction, sec. 8 [I, 46]. For further discussion, see Eugene Kelly’s valuable book, *Material Ethics of Value: Max Scheler and Nicolai Hartmann* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2011), chs. 1–2.

¹² Hartmann, *Ethik*, Introduction, sec. 8 [I, 46].

II.3

Four Fundamental Moral Values

Moral values are values of persons. Hartmann never attempts a moral typology of persons in the style of Scheler, but he certainly has his friend's view in mind when he writes about the four most fundamental moral values. Scheler differentiates between saints, heroes, geniuses, leading spirits of civilization, and artists of enjoyment. The first prototype he relates to values of the holy, the second to spiritual values, the third to vital values, the fourth to utility, and the last to pleasure.¹

Hartmann has a different grouping in mind. He focuses on the good, the noble, the pure, and the rich in experience. Each of them may dominate a person, but Hartmann prefers to consider them as a cluster. All four of them are values of great height but of low strength. Despite forming a separate constellation in the realm of moral values, they are actually antithetical to each other. A synthetic ideal of perfection that would include a balanced relation of all four has not been found.

The good, together with its counterpart (evil), is the central moral value. Hartmann does not consider it to be either the most elementary or the highest value. The good is not the most elementary moral value, to which other moral values could be reduced, or from which they could be derived. Against someone like G. I. Moore, whose views were enormously influential in the English-speaking world, Hartmann emphasizes the irreducible plurality of value phenomena, together with the view that the essence of the good is not simple. Following Nietzsche, he claims that we have only a fragmented knowledge of good and evil. Like all other values, the good is not definable. Yet we can discern it by means of our moral intuition and feeling, and this can be done when we consider it in contrast with other related values.

¹ See Max Scheler, *Person and Self-Value*, trans. M. S. Frings (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1987), 127–98.

Both good and evil depend on the intended direction of our volition. The good is an orientation toward highest values; it is the ability to discern the higher value in a conflict of two positive values and then realize it in the real world.

Hartmann does not believe in the good for the sake of good. That is why the good is never the highest value, and also why it is never the intended value (despite our common language that suggests otherwise). The value of good is the value of intention. This point can be clarified by contrasting good with evil. Hartmann defends a version of the Socratic view that we never choose evil, that we are not satanic beings. It is impossible for us to choose what we do not consider, in some sense, valuable. Because of the nature of human volition, our choice is never directed toward anything contrary to value as such. No one does evil for evil's sake. Our cravings are always toward the positive, toward the valuable. A thief desires to possess some material goods. For him they are valuable, otherwise he would not steal. This, of course, does not make his action good, for in pursuit of some good as value he violates a still higher value, the moral value. There are, however, more complicated cases of evil:

In the case of elementary badness, like brutality, unscrupulous greed and dishonesty, where it is evident that even in the absence of feeling toward the disvalue (hence also toward the value) there is a moral inferiority. In the life of the soul there exists factors which obscure value, and the person himself is by no means guiltless in regard to such factors.²

Hartmann does not want to explain away such complex cases of evil: either by means of the Socratic belief that virtue is knowledge and vice is ignorance, or the Christian view of the weakness of the will, or the Augustinian conception of evil as the privation of good, or Arendt's insight into the banality of evil. There is almost always more than one factor involved, but, in the end, we need to agree with Aristotle that ultimately each person is to blame for not discriminating properly between competing values.

As Hartmann considers it, the good does not fit into Scheler's moral topology. Hartmann's view of the noble is closer to this topology, especially to Scheler's conception of a hero, which in Western civilization is regularly symbolized in the form of a noble warrior. Nobility is a knightly virtue. It

² Hartmann, *Ethik*, ch. 84 [III, 256].

consists in the pursuit of one value at the exclusion of all others. The noble is an inner disposition directed toward the highest, toward the exceptional ideal, in the search for which a person becomes detached from everything trivial or secondary.

Nobility of the character is the pursuit of a value that is not common to all. It is an aristocracy of disposition: the magnanimity, generosity, large-heartedness, high-mindedness. Nobility presupposes goodness, but it aims at what it perceives as best, and not simply as good. A noble character displays revolutionary tendencies; he is never willing to compromise the chosen value; he is never satisfied with half-measures. Such a character experiences the joy of devotion toward what is above him and looks away from, often even openly despises, what is below him. He looks at all that is narrow and pitiful as his enemy. The noble is the forward-looking attitude.

The last two of Hartmann's four fundamental values, purity and richness of experience, are utterly fascinating. They only partially correspond to Scheler's values of the holy and the pleasurable. Purity means being unstained by evil: he is pure whom no desire leads astray, whom no temptation allures. Not surprisingly, as the exemplars of purity Hartmann lists Jesus, and also two of Dostoevsky's characters who are both the "fools for Christ": Prince Myshkin from *The Idiot* and Alyosha from *The Brothers Karamazov*. In all three cases there is a lack of moral experience: innocence is considered the highest good, sin the greatest evil. Besides sin, the opposites of purity are pollution and defilement.

Purity of heart is the primal Christian virtue. In the religious context purity is considered the whole meaning of moral virtue, but this view is one-sided and too extreme. Without a doubt, there is much that is good about purity: it is always connected with sincerity, frankness, openness, and truthfulness. A pure person never wears a mask, never tells a lie. He does not judge anyone, nor does he condemn any sin. He believes in goodness in every man, he is optimistic in a childlike way. Perfect purity borders on saintliness.

Purity cannot be identified with goodness, either quantitatively or qualitatively. While the meaning of goodness is entirely positive, that of purity, as the meaning of its word implies, is negative. Not only is the pure person unstained by evil and ignorant of it, such a person does not pursue any ends, he knows nothing of a wondering and struggling consciousness of the impure mind. He who is pure does not judge or condemn others, but he also does not actualize any value, any goal. Innocence does not resist evil, because it does not see it. Or, if seeing evil, it does not understand it and believes in some hidden goodness behind it.

Hartmann has high esteem for the value of the pure. Purity is extremely rare; it is given, not acquired. This is why it virtually always appears as a gift of grace. Perhaps more than any other moral value, purity should be connected not with action but with disposition. The power of the pure is not in his deeds but in his mere existence. This power should never be underestimated:

[D]espite its originally negative character, [purity] shows itself to be eminently positive and creative energy in life. Nothing perhaps works so powerfully, so convincingly, for good, and so transforms others in their innermost character, as the mere presence of a pure-minded person who pursues the right undisturbed, just as he sees and understands it in his simplicity. Precisely in his obliviousness to evil, in his failure to understand it and to react to it, he becomes a symbol and attracts the fallen and the morally prostrate.³

Evil shuns the light by its nature. The guilty ones are powerless against purity. They never feel their weakness and sin more acutely than when they encounter the pure: “At the sight of Jesus, by his mere word, shrewd calculation and subtlety are silenced.”⁴

Purity is one of those moral values that cannot be striven for. It is either fulfilled in a person, or it is forever unattainable. This may be why, by one of those strange twists of the human psyche, we crave it so much. The higher we estimate the value of purity, the stronger our “metaphysical need” for the restoration of the lost innocence becomes. In ethics, innocence lost cannot be restored. As Hartmann correctly points out, this is not the last word. Religion attempts to do what is ethically impossible:

The ancient concept of “purification” (*κάθαρσις*) [and the Christian] “wiping away of guilt” is joined with the thought of forgiveness and salvation through the suffering and sacrifice of the divinity intervening for man. Purity returns as a gift of grace. The condition which man must fulfill is simply belief. The mystery of the new birth resolves the antinomy of the values.⁵

The mystery of the new birth, the ability to begin anew, as if the slate is wiped clean, may temporarily resolve the antinomy of values. Not for

³ Hartmann, *Ethik*, ch. 42c [II, 214].

⁴ Hartmann, *Ethik*, ch. 42c [II, 215].

⁵ Hartmann, *Ethik*, ch. 42g [II, 221].

long. For from the purity of life, from the complete innocence, we quickly shift toward the richness of life and its complexity, which draws us back into the conflicts of values. The irresolvable conflicts of values stain us again.

If purity were the sole content of goodness, the outlook for our humanity would be extremely pessimistic: such purity cannot be humanly preserved. This is why its exemplars are a son of God and two fictional characters. This is why Alyosha Karamazov is not the main hero of Dostoevsky's most powerful novel. If this novel has a hero, it is his oldest brother, Dmitry. He exemplifies what Hartmann calls "richness of experience."

Richness of experience stands opposed to all three other fundamental moral values. It is a pursuit of all values, of the fullness of life. The person dominated by this value shines with optimism that the greatest unity of the greatest diversity is attainable. This person finds enough room in his soul for genuine and tragic conflicts, which dominate our lives. Richness of experience is the value of many-sidedness, including much that is not good, or noble, or pure. Hartmann holds richness of experience in especially high esteem, for he finds it necessary for moral maturation: "There is certainly no other way to ethical maturity and expansion than through the conflicts of life itself, through 'moral experience'—even experience of wrong-doing, and this perhaps most of all."⁶

It is of indispensable value to struggle, and even to fail. There is no other moral value that so adequately reflects the essential incompleteness of man, his unquenchable thirst for the higher and the highest, as well as the curiosity toward the most diverse, including that which is of dubious moral value. One of the most important of Hartmann's philosophical insights is that there may be no higher value than the living of our life to the fullest, the spending of life.

Ethical actuality is richer than all human phantasy, than dream and fiction. To live apathetically from moment to moment amid the abundance, is nothing short of sin. The narrowness of a man's participating sense of value makes him poor. It is because of his prejudice, his blindness, that he does not see the abundance, in the midst of which he stands. The ethos of openness to all values is the tendency to do inward justice to life, to win from it its greatness. Its passion springs from reverence for the unbounded abundance of the

⁶ Hartmann, *Ethik*, ch. 41c [II, 209]. See *Ethik*, ch. 50b [II, 285].

things that are of worth, it is knowledge filled with gratitude; and, where knowledge fails, it is the presentiment that the values of existence are inexhaustible. Whoever lives in this attitude, by him every restriction of experience is recognized as superficiality, dullness, barrenness, a waste of life . . . a moral ingratitude.⁷

⁷ Hartmann, *Ethik*, ch. 41c [II, 210].

II.4

Four Forms of Love

Hartmann isolates four fundamental moral values and presents them in a systematic order. They are the backbone of his moral philosophy, the foundation on which to build the comprehension of other moral values. These four values are not the highest. Hartmann hints that the value of love elevates above all other moral values. Presented at different places in *Ethics* are four forms of love: brotherly love, love of the remote, radiant virtue, and personal love. Hartmann does not compare them with the four fundamental moral values, but a correlation does exist. Brotherly love is most closely associated with the good, love of the remote with the noble, radiant virtue with the pure and personal love with the richness of experience. We should be careful not to read too much into this correlation. Nevertheless, some important insights into Hartmann's thinking and the ranking of values can be drawn from it.

In any of its forms, Hartmann understands love in terms of personal dispositions, as a disposition of affirmation. Many of his remarks about love remind us of Kant's concept of good will, as the only thing in the world that is unconditionally good. Not only does love belong to the highest level of values, it also leads to the development of personality and contributes to the meaning of life.

The term "brotherly love" is our rendering of the Greek word *αγάπη*. Christianity promotes this form of love (in contrast to the ancient *ἔρωσ* and *φιλία*), which is a form of spontaneous love, directed toward those who stand to us the nearest. Without discriminating who they are, we intuitively recognize when they need our compassion and help. This Christian value does not refer primarily to the emotional side, but rather to one's disposition and intention, followed by one's conduct. Brotherly love is a loving sense of another person's worth.

In modern times, we think of brotherly love in contrast to justice. Justice is one of the lowest and most elementary values. Both justice and brotherly love deal with humanity at a general level. Brotherly love concerns another person regardless of his rights or worthiness, while

justice puts all human beings on the same level. Yet there is a significant difference between them: “justice may be unloving, brotherly love quite unjust.”¹ While justice is directed outward, while it unites merely the surface of one person with the surface of another, brotherly love is directed inward. Brotherly love has its deep roots in the spirit and, like the good, has a potential to become the unifying principle of all values. Nevertheless, brotherly love does not involve a fusion of two persons, but only a participation of one person in the life of another. Brotherly love is solidarity with another person, a fundamentally positive devotion to the general humanity of another.

In the case of brotherly love we overcome one form of egoism; when dealing with love of the remote, the egoism is of a different kind. In one case we are dealing with egoism in contrast to altruism, in another with egoism of those who live here and now in contrast to the interest of those who are remote, not only in space but also in time. While brotherly love is an everyday virtue, love of the remote is an exceptional one. Following Nietzsche, Hartmann treats love of the remote as higher than that of brotherly love, insofar as it consists in striving toward the humanely ideal. This is the foundation of progress, which must discriminate between good and bad, mediocre and excellent, what is and what ought to be. Human beings are ethically unequal, and they ought to be unequal. The more unequal they are, the more movement there is in the process of development and the higher are the ends at which they aim.

Hartmann regards love of the remote—better yet: of the remotest (*Fernstenliebe*)—as love of the best, as love of the worthiest and the noblest. It is the love of the creative spirit in humanity, the Platonic *ἔρως* striving toward Beauty in itself, as it is portrayed by Socrates in *Symposium*. It is not accidental that this value is most of all promoted by poets. Not just Homer and Plato, but everywhere, in every culture and every epoch, poets are the greatest of the creative spirits, since they set in front of humanity the ideals visualized in a palpable form. Regardless of individual nuances in setting such ideals, striving is always directed in the same way:

Greatness of moral spirit, intensity of spiritual energy, which is required in the taking upon oneself of what is inherently uncertain. The venture is great. Only a deep and mighty faith, permeating a person’s whole being, is equal to it . . . It is a faith on the grand scale, faith in a higher order, which determines the cosmic meaning of man.²

¹ Hartmann, *Ethik*, ch. 49c [II, 271].

² Hartmann, *Ethik*, ch. 55e [II, 330]. See also *Ethik*, ch. 52e [II, 296–7].

While a poet sets an ideal as something remote, a perfection to be forever approximated even if it can never be reached, the radiant virtue shows an ideal in one exemplary individual, right here and now. Following Nietzsche's lead again, Hartmann speaks about "*Schenkende Tugend*," which we translate as "radiant virtue," but which primarily refers to a virtue of bestowing gifts. Not an abstract ideal, like Beauty in itself, but a concrete individual, like the personality of Socrates, shines like gold and radiates virtue around himself. He is a living proof that an ideal is possible in our imperfect world.

Unlike our exchange economy, in which one who gives away becomes poorer, in the gift economy the person who bestows the gift stands himself as a recipient of gifts. Radiance comes from the life of spiritual fullness, from the overflowing of it in an actual person. In the case of brotherly love, the dispensing of love occurs because of the recognized need of the others. Radiant virtue consists in bestowing from the pressure of the fullness of life within. It is directed toward all who are capable of appreciating its worth.

Hence it comes about that to the impartor of spiritual goods it is not the just, the truthful, the loving, or the faithful man who is the worthiest, but he who receives it with an open heart, the unspoiled spirit which is still capable of unlearning everything. That is why the man of radiant virtue loves those who are ethically imperfect, unripe, unspent and still flexible, with the love peculiar to one who has mellowed, is blessed and is filled with gratitude. He is the eternal *έραστής* of youth.³

"The eternal lover of youth" is the truest teacher of values. He is the person who, through the spiritual fullness that he radiates, opens the hearts, and sharpens the eyes of others for the richness of life. Those "who are ethically imperfect, unripe, unspent and still flexible" walk away from the person of radiant virtue without really understanding what they have received. They certainly do not obtain any utilitarian, serviceable value. They gain something that corresponds to their spiritual needs, a useless value pointing toward the meaning of life.

One of the central claims of Hartmann's entire philosophical opus is that it is precisely useless values that bestow meaning upon life. By uselessness he means neither fruitlessness nor meaninglessness. Uselessness only refers

³ Hartmann, *Ethik*, ch. 56c [II, 338]. For further discussion of radiant value—albeit without reference to Hartmann, Nietzsche, or Socrates—see Lewis Hyde's extraordinary book, *The Gift* (New York: Random House, 2007).

to the absence of any tangible purpose or visible end. It is useless values that we rely on when we attempt to justify our claim upon life. It is on such values that we depend when we attempt to bestow meaning on our strivings and struggles.

In his ontology, Hartmann claims that not all of reality, perhaps only a small part, is meaningful. His ethical view regarding the role of radiant virtue in bestowing meaning is consistent with his ontology.

It does not matter that radiant virtue is uncommon and is a moral power found in the few only Values are not diminished through the narrowness of the area in which they are actualized. A single individual can be the giver of meaning for a whole world, insofar as it participates in him. A life in which only one such exists becomes full of significance for everybody. This does not at all imply individualism. The import here does not depend upon the individual value of the one. Nothing rests with him merely as “this person here.” It is only the vindication of all and the giving of meaning for all, which wins through him. The virtue of the exceptional man inheres precisely in the fact that he is uncommon, yet again in a higher sense is all-common. As it is an overflowing of the fullness of life upon all who are reaching in any way toward its value, so too it is, morally, a shining-forth upon all who have any degree of sensibility for the meaning and its vindication. Thus finally, its unplanned work is a solidarity of a unique and novel kind, a solidarity not of aims or of guilt or of responsibility, but of participation and fulfillment.⁴

Just as radiant virtue can bestow the meaning upon life, so can personal love. Hartmann seems to find personal love more elevating since he claims that it gives ultimate meaning to life. While radiant virtue spreads its gifts around indiscriminately, to all who are open-minded and open-hearted to appreciate them, personal love directs itself to one unique individual. In describing the virtue of personal love, Hartmann becomes poetic: “And the mystery of love is that it satisfies this deepest and least understood craving. One who loves gives this unique gift to the person he loves. He gives a new dimension to the being of the loved one, enabling him to be ‘for himself’ what otherwise he is only ‘in himself’.”⁵

Brotherly love is related to the humanity in general of those who are near us; we love them for who they are, not for what they can become.

⁴ Hartmann, *Ethik*, ch. 56d [II, 339].

⁵ Hartmann, *Ethik*, ch. 58a [II, 369].

In love of the remote, our sight is raised toward the ideal of humanity in general, toward the most noble and the best that humanity can become. In radiant virtue, we return to the individual, to the person who radiates goodness and spirituality around himself. In personal love, affirmative devotion is directed from one individual toward another. More precisely, it is directed toward the ideal of that unique individual. In every existing, empirically given and limited person there is an individual ideal of that person: the ideal of personality. Personal love “brings to light the otherwise hidden and neglected essence of one’s individuality.”⁶

We habitually say that personal love is blind, but Hartmann corrects this opinion. Personal love is blind to the surface of personality and its general empirical and humanitarian aspects. Despite that, or just because of it, personal love is capable of taking us much deeper toward the essence of personality, toward its individual ideal, than any other form of cognition, than any other form of love. When it comes to such depth, “he who loves is the only one who sees; while he who is without love is blind.”⁷ We do not see that this is the case because we have too narrow a conception of knowledge. Just as the highest values are the individual values, so the highest form of knowledge is the knowledge of the individual. It is entirely wrong to limit knowledge to a thinking, reflective, or rational consciousness of an object. “Valuational knowledge,” as Hartmann calls it, is knowledge of the individual and unique, and it is based on feeling, on sharpened and sensitive intuition for the richness of values.

Hartmann also wants to distinguish this conception of personal love from the oft-repeated clichés regarding romantic love. He reminds us that the bliss that a person experiences in love consists not in being in love, but in loving. In loving, in striving toward uniting our own innermost depth with the innermost depth of another person, personal love does not simply aim at happiness. Speaking about happiness even obscures the understanding of personal love more than it clarifies it. To shed more light on the issue, he maintains that personal love is “beyond happiness and unhappiness.” Happiness is secondary in love; love always involves both suffering and joy. Ever a lover of aporias and paradoxes, Hartmann even claims that,

⁶ Hartmann, *Ethik*, ch. 58b [II, 371]. Similarly Scheler: “love is that movement wherein every concrete individual object that possesses value achieves the highest value compatible with its nature and ideal vocation; or wherein it attains the ideal state of value intrinsic to its nature”; *The Nature of Sympathy*, trans. P. Heath (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2008), 161.

⁷ Hartmann, *Ethik*, ch. 58f [II, 379].

“The suffering of one who loves can even be happy, his happiness [can] be painful.”⁸

Hartmann is not playing with words. In fact, he emphasizes that the experience of love is one of those that shows the limitations and inflexibility of our ordinary language. Personal love overcomes such limitation. The lovers develop their own language, their own signs and signals, by which they can in one glance gain the knowledge they need of the soul of their lovers. Here every gesture is important. Every movement, every smile conveys a message: the two souls are united and yet they remain two. Personal love makes possible the participation in each other’s souls. It makes possible the intuitive vision of the best and the highest. The penetrating knowledge of personal love may be one of the greatest mysteries of the universe, perhaps the greatest mystery of all.

⁸ Hartmann, *Ethik*, ch. 58d [II, 376]. For further discussion, see Eugene Kelly, *Material Ethics of Value*, chs. 8.3–4, 10.5, and 10.8.5.

II.5

Aesthetic Object and Aesthetic Act

The experience of beauty does not remove us from the field of mystery. If anything, it takes us even deeper into the wonders of life, into the wonders of values that serve no direct useful purpose in life. To account for the mysterious relevance of the useless art, philosophers have repeatedly brought art, and our experience of it, into a too close connection with either cognition or morality. Hartmann rejects both ideas. The essence of art is not cognitive, nor is it moral. Art has an irreducible degree of autonomy, and more than once Hartmann indicates that aesthetic values may have the most elevated position in the realm of values.

Yet values such as beauty and sublimity, tragic and comic, are not detached from other values, spiritual or nonspiritual. Nor is art without a significant relation to both cognition and morality. The nature of art is complex and multilayered. We will never disentangle all of its knots, but we can avoid some of the distorting views with regard to its nature. Further, we can bring some light to our understanding of why the experience of beauty is so fundamentally important for the human way of life.

Hartmann insists that aesthetics deals with beauty in all its manifestations, not just in art. He discusses beauty in nature and human beauty as well. Hartmann goes so far as to wonder if there is anything in this world which does not have an aesthetic side and which cannot be regarded as an aesthetic object. Not only the magnificent movements of an antelope or the splendid colors of a butterfly, but the structure of a crystal and even a starry sky above us can lead to an experience of beauty. In fact, it is precisely something like the starry heavens, seen far away from the bustle of a city and its blinding lights, which has been regarded since ancient times as the most beautiful and perfect reality that can be seen by man. Whether or not this is so, there is a reason why beauty, in all of its forms, has always been considered the central aesthetic value.

Those who deny the role of natural and human beauty in aesthetics rely too heavily either on the aesthetic idea (content) or the aesthetic form. In either case, such an idea or form is something created by the artist.

Hartmann counters such views. Even in the case of an artistic genius, the essence of the artistry consists not in the creative side but in the *way of seeing*, which eventually leads to a new idea or a new form. A poet, for example, is first and foremost someone who walks through life with eyes wide open and in doing so recognizes artistic forms and ideas in what to others may seem to be the most ordinary things and appearances.

Just as he rejects the centrality of the form-matter distinction in ontology, Hartmann's aesthetic analysis does not directly rely either on the content or on the form of art. Aesthetic analysis can focus on (1) the aesthetic object, or (2) the aesthetic act. The aesthetic object can be further analyzed in terms of (i) its ontological structure, or (ii) its aesthetic value character. The aesthetic act is discernible in terms of (iii) the receptive act of the spectator, or (iv) the creative act of the artist. Nineteenth-century aesthetics had been preoccupied with this last aspect, especially when understood as the nature of genius. Hartmann believes that precisely this aspect of art resists our analysis the most. There is no "science" of genius, nor any aesthetics of the creative process. Hartmann's phenomenological aesthetics centers on (i–iii).

Although we cannot understand how a work of art is created, we know that an artistic production occurs when great ideas move people and the passion with which an idea is adhered leads to its expression. This insight leads Hartmann to argue that a work of art has (at least) two ontological layers. What we call a work of art clearly has a real existence. It is a physical object, which consists of patches of paint on canvas, notes on a piece of paper, or parts of marble (or some other material) put together into a statue. A work of art cannot exist in the imagination of its creator; it must be actualized in one way or another.

This material layer, which belongs to real being, is necessary but not sufficient for a work of art. There must also be an additional layer, a layer Hartmann calls "irreal": something that contains the idea and ties it to the real layer.¹ Only when these heterogeneous layers are brought together can we call it a work of art. To be even more precise, only when these layers do not appear separated, when this two-fold being appears as unified, can we properly speak about a work of art.

The secret of art consists in this relationship of appearing. The real and material layer enables the appearance of something that is neither real nor material, and these two layers appear organically integrated and harmonious. The material layer forms the "foreground," and the irreal layer

¹ See Hartmann, *Ästhetik*, ch. 5, 82–93, and ch. 41, 457–67. See also Hartmann, *Das Problem des geistigen Seins*, ch. 46cd, 424–6.

provides the “background.” What lies in the background is never realized or materialized by and through the foreground. It is only made to appear, to become apparent, to shine through. The essence of art is not in the object that appears, but in the way in which it appears; it is not in the *what* but in the *how*. An artistic object thus has a unique kind of existence; it floats between two heterogeneous layers, without residing in either one. An artistic object exists only in this interactive unity.

It is noteworthy that Hartmann calls the background layer “irreal” rather than “ideal.” An ideal being is, for him, always something that has a certain necessity in it. A moral value, or a logical principle, reveals a certain (moral or logical) “ought.” An idea subsisting in the background layer of a work of art and appearing through its real front layer has a different modality—that of possibility. Such an idea helps us “see” what *could* be.

Hartmann associates ideas with the spiritual realm of being. Recall that he distinguishes between personal spirit (the spirit of an individual human being), historical-objective spirit (the spirit of time in one group of people or culture), and objectified spirit (the spirit objectified as an institution or a work of a certain kind). An idea leading to a work of art can be associated with all three aspects of the spiritual life. A personal spirit is the one that comes up with this idea, and the idea may be the expression of the spirit of one’s time and culture, or it can stand in an opposition to that historical-objective spirit. Be it as it may, such an idea is objectified in a work of art, just as a legal idea can be objectified through law and the institutions that implement it.

In the case of law, the institutions implementing it have already materialized. With a work of art, such an implementation must always be done anew. The creator of a work of art sets up an idea, that is, a certain spiritual content, which is then given expression through the material layer. This spiritual content is irreal because it requires a living spirit to let it shine through the real layer always anew. To be experienced as a work of art, the spiritual content “deposited” in the material layer must be pulled out, freed, and made alive by a living spirit.

This view leads Hartmann to formulate two laws of the “objectification” of a work of art: (i) Its spiritual content can be maintained only if it is tied to a real and sensible material and carried by it in accordance with the form into which this material is shaped. (ii) This spiritual content, as carried by formed matter, always requires a living spirit, the spirit that recognizes and understands it. It requires a spirit for whom this content can appear, mediated by the formed matter.

These laws of objectification clarify both the ontological reality and the ontological irreality of a work of art. They also illuminate for us that the

threefold relation is required for the experience of a work of art: the relation between formed matter, spiritual content, and the living spirit that connects them.

The aesthetic act is no less complex than the aesthetic object. Just as we cannot unveil the secret of dialectical thinking, not much can be said as a way of analysis with regard to the creative act. Referring to the title of Kant's third *Critique* (*Kritik der Urtheilskraft / Critique of Power of Judgment*), Hartmann says that the essence of art as a *Kraft* consists in the artistic ability to find "with somnambulistic certainty" the right form for the idea the artist is trying to express: "He can struggle to find this right form for a long time and difficult temptations, but at the end it must be that, once he had found it, he has complete certainty in it, that is, he recognizes it with intuitive certainty, as the only adequate form."²

If we ignore the creative aspect of the act, we can still distinguish between (i) the moment of perception, (ii) the moment of satisfaction (or the experience of pleasure), and (iii) the moment of evaluation. Kant and the aestheticians that follow him talk about the experience of pleasure or displeasure, but they collapse all three moments into that one.

Hartmann pays special attention to the first moment, that is, to the living feeling of aesthetic values. This feeling is unique for aesthetic experience: language does not have names for many of its aspects, nor does our thinking have corresponding concepts for them. Aesthetic feeling and aesthetic perception should not be identified with sensory experience. To clarify this distinction, Hartmann gives a short evolutionary account of perception, and distinguishes between the perception of the "first order" and the "second order." Our initial, "primitive" way of perceiving was always immediate and affectionate. Emotions and affectionate reactions could not be separated from the "objectified" qualities of the perceived object. During the course of time, human beings have developed an "objective" way of perceiving reality, the way that either excludes the affective aspects of the perceived fragments of reality, or overlooks them. Our perception has become more practically oriented and further detached from the emotional aspects of things.

In our cognitive experience, the puzzle is the following: How can something that is sensible (objects of perception) appear through something else that is not sensible (mental representations)? In aesthetic experience, the puzzle is reversed: How can something that is not sensible (an idea) appear through something that is sensible (for example, patches of color on the canvas)?

² Hartmann, *Ästhetik*, ch. 41d, 466.

In addition to our cognitive “*looking at something*,” in aesthetic experience there is also a different way of perception, which Hartmann characterizes as “*looking through something*.” This properly aesthetic way of looking he calls the perception of a “second” and “higher” order. In a landscape in front of us, besides its physical characteristics, we immediately sense the mood (such as calmness, or a tension before a storm). In the face of the person passing by, in addition to the parts of the face, we sense the person’s suffering or joy. This perception of the second order is creative in the case of the artist and re-creative in the case of the observer. Perception of the second order is constitutive for our experience of aesthetic values.³

In this regard, aesthetic values are different from any other kind. During a creative or re-creative act of perception, we do not perceive only aesthetic values. Often, vital values (health, strength, etc.), goods as values (wealth, good living conditions, etc.), cognitive values (knowledge, truth), or moral values (goodness, truthfulness, justice, etc.) are perceived as well. The perception of aesthetic values “rides on the back” of the perception of other values.⁴ In other words, the perception of aesthetic values is conditioned by our ability to perceive nonaesthetic values.

Just as goodness is the symbol of all moral values, beauty is the central representative of all aesthetic values. Beauty does not depend on what is represented and perceived but on *how it appears*. That is why aesthetic values are not general (like vital and moral values), but have a special value for each aesthetic object and for each observer. They are individual and unique values, insofar as they are values that cannot be anticipated in advance, prior to our experience of such objects.

How is it, then, that two observers, looking at the same painting, can have such different experiences: one perceives it as beautiful while the other does not?

According to Hartmann, this is so because, aesthetically, not ontologically, every work of art is essentially incomplete. It has to be completed by the observer, and reaction to such a work becomes an active process of completion. This is why two observers, or one and the same observer at different times and in dissimilar situations, can observe the same work in such diverse ways.

These deviations do not imply the relativity of aesthetic values. Hartmann explains the issue regarding the alleged relativity of values by differentiating between the relativity of the feeling of values and the relativity of the judgment regarding values. The same distinction holds for

³ See Hartmann, *Ästhetik*, chs. 1–4, 42–82.

⁴ Hartmann borrows this expression from Scheler’s *Formalism in Ethics*, 48.

all kinds of values. The narrowness of an individual's awareness of values and sensibility toward them can vary to a significant degree. An individual can be well attuned for the perception of a certain fragment of values, but oblivious to many other values composing its complex net. It is similar with the degree of sensibility of one culture or one age. Certain frequently occurring types of situations stimulate our perception of some values, but lead us to neglect or overlook others.

The fact that the aesthetic sensibilities and taste of one individual and one epoch change does not imply that aesthetic values themselves change. Nor does it entail that they are relative. Just as the objective validity of one mathematical judgment does not mean that every person, or even every mathematically informed person, would grasp and approve of it, this cannot be expected from aesthetic judgments. Objective validity in both cases means only that those who do grasp such a judgment can accept it and approve of it, because in the process of grasping they feel its internal value. With an adequate attitude, the aesthetic values of importance for one epoch (culture, nation) can be valid and accepted for those living in different epochs and with differently oriented spirit: "this is possible only if such values are in essence absolute; their [alleged] relativity . . . is only the relativity of the temporary and changeable directions of the feeling of value."⁵

⁵ Hartmann, *Ästhetik*, ch. 29c, 362. See also Nicolai Hartmann, *Einführung in die Philosophie* (Osnabrück: L. Hanckel, 1949), 175–7.

II.6

Aesthetic Values

Hartmann thinks that there have been more misconceptions with regard to aesthetics than with regard to axiology. The starry heavens of values are always distant, and our ignorance and lack of sensitivity prevent us from fully comprehending the values that seem so remote. Aesthetic values, such as beautiful, comic, charming, and tragic, appear closer because they are part and parcel of our everyday experiences. Even the tragic and sublime lurk in the background of our lives and do not appear too remote or unreachable.

In fact, a problem with aesthetic values is that they may be too close. They are so close that it is hard to establish any distance to classify them properly. They are also fluid and therefore difficult to capture in ordinary language; a face that appears beautiful from one angle need not appear so if we simply change our angle. Aesthetic values are so individual that our linguistic capacity lags far behind our aesthetic feeling for values. Only a few fairly general aesthetic values have names because our language is incapable of reaching most of them.

One of the reasons we do not attempt to develop a more precise language is that we think of aesthetic values as having secondary importance. They are at best considered to be a spice of life, a welcome but unnecessary addition to the food that sustains us. Although the depth of our craving for aesthetic values may suggest something else, we stick to our belief in the impractical and negligible role of aesthetic values and show the tendency to subsume them under cognitive or, even more frequently, under moral values.

Hartmann continually fights against the ingrained cognitivist and moralistic interpretations of aesthetic values. He also holds that aesthetic values are higher, and weaker, than cognitive and moral values. In accordance with his ontological view, cognitive and moral values have a founding role for the realization of aesthetic values. The foundation always comes from below. Meaning, by contrast, always descends from above. In bestowing meaning, the sublime will become of utmost importance. As we will later see, the experience of sublimity may bring us to heights that would

otherwise remain impenetrable. Before coming to this fascinating view, we must prepare ourselves with some groundwork that will shed further light on the relationship of the aesthetic with other kinds of values.

Cognitive, moral, and aesthetic values are all spiritual, yet they have different carriers. In the case of cognitive values, the carriers are cognitive judgments; such judgments are valuable when they correspond to the given states of affairs. For moral values, the carriers are always human beings as persons; acts and attitudes of persons are what we judge as good or evil, just or unjust. Anything can be a carrier of aesthetic values, as long as it appears and is perceived in a certain way. The possibility of appearing of the irreal background in the real foreground is available only to a living spirit. An aesthetic value of something belongs to it only in relationship with someone who perceives it in the proper way. When this occurs the two meanings of "aesthetics," the original, which refers to what appears (*αἴσθησις*) and the latter, which is related to artistic taste, are combined together.

There is another significant difference between cognitive judgments and our experience of works of art. Even Kant tries to preserve this distinction by separating "determinative" from "reflective" judgments. Determinative judgments are those in which we subsume the immediately perceived particulars ("the manifold of appearances") under already established general concepts (or "universals"). Reflective judgments are those in which a proper universal does not pre-exist, but has to be found in accordance with what is immediately perceived. Kant makes this distinction only in the introduction of the *Critique of Judgment*, but it is clear that, in retrospect, he considers cognitive and moral judgments to be determinative, while aesthetic (and teleological) judgments are reflective.

Hartmann does not discuss aesthetic values in terms of judgments, but retains the idea that cognitive and moral judgments are based on determinative concepts. Far more important for him is the disparity that exists in the relationship between the background and the foreground in the cases of concepts and works of art. With concepts, this relationship is conventional and attached to them from the outside. Aristotle's concepts, such as *δύναμις* and *ἐνέργεια*, make sense only within the framework of his metaphysical system. In the case of scientific theory, its concepts are based on the current state of research and knowledge. With changes in our philosophical and scientific interests and insights, such concepts are either radically changed or entirely abandoned. We can recreate them for historical reasons, but this possibility only underlines how arbitrary and conventional these concepts are.

This relationship is internal and based on inner affinities in a work of art. It does not depend on any external factor, broader context, or outside

framework. Rather, a work of art creates its own framework, and the relationship between background and foreground is made visible within the realm of the work. While a concept has an essence outside itself, the essence of an artistic work is always internally established. This is why, unlike ever-changing philosophical and scientific concepts, works of art have a different kind of stability and greater historical endurance. This is also why they have the ability to detach their observers from the reality that surrounds them and carry them into another world.

Although cognitive experience relies heavily on concepts, Hartmann argues that concepts are not and do not lead to the highest degree of cognition. Nor are principles the highest degree of knowledge. This may sound shocking when coming from a philosopher, but Hartmann stands firmly behind this conviction. Concepts and principles, including the categorial concepts, are important and indispensable, but they capture only the general features of various fragments of reality. They fail to capture individual characteristics, and it is precisely what is individual and unique that Hartmann considers real in the highest degree. (Recall that the defining categories of any real being, regardless of the strata to which it belongs, are the categories of individuality and temporality.) While our cognition captures the general features of objects, in the case of aesthetic experience perceived objects appear in their full individuality and uniqueness. This is why aesthetic experience may lead to a higher form of cognition. The highest and the most difficult kind of knowledge is that of actually existing beings, of individuals. For that kind of knowledge, we must rely on intuition rather than reason-based general concepts, on the attentiveness to what is in front of us rather than on the power of abstraction.

While our cognitive values provide stability in the experienced world by “boxing” things into its categories, moral values generate stability by showing us what ought to be. Both cognitive and moral values are “heavy”; they tie us to the world as it is, or to the world as it ought to be. By contrast, aesthetic values are “light.” They lift us up above the given and the commanded; they show us what could be. Aesthetic values do not depend on whether or not someone like Hamlet and King Lear, Prince Myshkin or Dmitry Karamazov really exist in the world. Nor do they depend on the victory of good over evil. All that is important is the artistic formation of scenes and characters that enables an idea to shine through the real foreground.

Aesthetic objects do not demand anything of us except the openness of the mind and the perceptive appreciation of the world. When we are open-minded and capable of perception of the higher order, aesthetic values seem to come to us as gifts. They “fly to us” and create an impression that everything is “good,” not in the moral sense of good, but in the sense of

meaningfulness. They give an impression that, somehow, everything is just as it should be. It is as if aesthetic values have an extraordinary liberating power. As ontologically speaking aesthetic objects have a floating existence, the experience of aesthetic values creates in us a pleasurable impression of the "lightness of being." This feeling of pleasure is primarily spiritual, not sensible. It occurs only with perception of the higher order, with the experience of harmony between the background idea and the foreground material used to express this idea.

We encounter a play of forms in the experience of a work of art, rather than something useful and purposeful. "Play," "playing," and "playfulness" contrast the practical aspect of life, focused as it is on usefulness and expedience. They stand in opposition to all attempts to control reality; cognitively, morally, technologically, politically, or economically. This does not mean that artistic play of ideas and forms is entirely indifferent to reality, or that it is not subsumed under the laws and constraints of that reality. Rather, it simply means that their relationship is based on different grounds and functions. The playfulness of art may not necessarily be useful in the most direct sense, but it sheds a special light over reality. It is as if it elevates this reality against its own weight, against its own limitations.

Just as life is useless from the perspective of immaterial objects, so is spirit useless to living beings. There may well be living beings without spirit, but life comes to its highest point in spirit and through spirit. At this point something radiates from it and illuminates that life. In the light of this illumination, everything becomes meaningful, even without any practical implication, or any discoverable purpose. We associate art with luxury, but Hartmann goes beyond that. Useless things are the most sublime; they are the ones that bestow meaning on everything else, including our cognitive and moral values. While the world is built from bottom up, its meaning comes from the top and permeates to the bottom. That is the significance of art: it is of no use to the life of an organism, or to its conscious life. Yet, through the experience of art we reach a culminating point that illuminates all of life's other aspects.

Art serves more than a cultivating, educational, or moralizing function. The true role of art is something incomparably higher. Only after considering the role of truth in art and the nature of the sublime can we fully grasp this role.

Truth in Art

Hartmann distinguishes between four different kinds of truth: (i) factual (or cognitive) truth; (ii) living truth; (iii) essential (or ideal) truth, and (iv) artistic truth. In this section we will explore their differences and their interconnectedness.

A work of art is the result of a free, creative spirit. To be free and creative does not primarily mean to strive toward something new or unknown. Rather, it refers to the ability to intuitively grasp the inner unity of a complex structure—not just in one layer but in all of them together. A work of art is free insofar as it explores and finds a new way of forming something in the real foreground that is hidden in the background. That something has to appear in a unified way.

Artistic freedom may also lead to falsification of experienced reality. Hartmann mentions three causes for such falsifications. In the vast majority of cases, the falsification is due to the technical inability of the artist to give adequate form to a chosen idea. Second, it can also emerge as a result of exaggerated idealism, which leads an artist to portray things as more beautiful than they can be. Finally, the falsification may be due to the ethical intention that drives the artist toward overemphasized pedagogical effects. This last form of falsification can happen even to the best artists, as we witness in some late works of Goethe and Tolstoy. In order to appear authentic, an idea (or an ideal) must be grounded in a value that corresponds to the tendencies of the actual historical and ethical circumstances of some people. In addition to the requirements of dealing with the content of art, there is also a formal prerequisite requiring the ideal to be represented in its proper concreteness and vitality. This concretely represented ideal affects people more than any scientific truth or any abstract moral or religious precept.

All art must strive toward truth. That truth does not have to be factual or theoretical cognitive truth; it is not a mere correspondence with an existing reality. In order to articulate the kind of truth striven toward in art, Hartmann focuses on what he calls “poetry.” By “poetry” he means

virtually all literature (he considers Shakespeare and Dostoevsky as exemplary poets). He believes the demand for truth in poetry to be the clearest and the strongest. What we expect from poetry is not a factual but *living* truth. By that, Hartmann has in mind an agreement with real life, not in all of its minute details, but in its essential features. A living truth demands an adequacy in the presentation of types of characters, as well as the types of human situations, conflicts, accidents, and human destinies.

Hartmann maintains that every work of art has numerous layers. In many cases, the number of layers exceeds those we distinguished in ontology of real being. Besides the already mentioned real foreground and unreal background, there are several middle layers in every work of art. In these layers we can discern the moral character of a represented individual: his egoism or altruism, courage or fear, sense of responsibility or recklessness, *et cetera*. We find an individual experiencing moral conflicts and examine his reaction to their various types. Remember Dmitry in Dostoevsky's great novel, *The Brothers Karamazov*, who finds himself in a critical situation when the extremely beautiful Katerina Ivanovna begs him for money? Katerina begs in order to save the honor of her father. Dmitry wins her heart and trust, and also the heart and trust of the reader when, much to Katerina's surprise, he gives her a large sum of money and does not take advantage of her. His later recklessness cannot wholly erase the reader's remembrance of Dmitry's magnanimity.

Yet another layer develops in Dostoevsky's novel, which reveals not Dmitry's inner world but his overall destiny. The course of one's life cannot be portrayed through any single detail or episode. Rather, this involves many critical situations and relationships with other figures. Poetry infiltrates individual instances, providing clues for the character's overall life, even when the narrative does not follow this life from the beginning to the end.

The main function of representative art is to "make us see."¹ Just as philosophy teaches us to think and religion teaches us faith, art teaches us to see things. Learning how to see is by no means an easy task. In the multiplicity of data and situations, we must discern what is typically human and what characterizes us as living human beings.

Getting to know people as they really are usually has a sobering, negative effect. Yet art in general (and poetry in particular) is directed toward the positive. It does not teach us to reject but to appreciate. Art invites us to slow down and pause in our observation of reality and people living in it. It compels us to look at people with compassion, to see them through the eyes

¹ Hartmann, *Ästhetik*, ch. 23a, 293–4.

of one who admires and loves. Art directs our attention to that which we customarily overlook in our normal lives. The poet's gaze is in the direction of life's hidden treasures.

Here Hartmann touches on something of great significance. Our knowledge of people in practical life is aimed at the general and the typical. Poetry teaches us to observe and focus on the atypical, unique, and seemingly accidental. In this context, we recall Hartmann's differentiation between justice and various forms of love from his moral philosophy. A practical man recognizes the people to avoid, distinguishing them from those proper and just who may be useful as friends. This glimpse of reality, through the eyes of a practical man, is detached, cold, and calculating.

A poet cannot see the world in this way. He shows us what is worth paying attention to, regardless of any practical interest we may have. In his compassion and caring attention, he penetrates into the depths of the human soul. *Compassion* means "suffering with"; when we read of Dmitry's recklessness and foolishness, of his naiveté and essential goodness, we suffer with him the injustices of the cruel world that will not tolerate a wasteful person. Dostoevsky's art leads us to observe and follow Dmitry without judging him. Although we, the readers, cannot understand all of his motives and actions (Dmitry does not understand them himself), we take him as he is and follow him on the path of his life with a loving gaze.

Art can instruct us, lead us to new discoveries, and make us wiser. But these are not the only aims of art. Hartmann surprises us when he says that one of the basic functions of art is to cheer us up. Life is often harsh and unpleasant. Against this living truth stands a quest for beauty that Hartmann connects with the idea that art enlivens us. The quest for beauty must be synthesized in a work of art. Paradoxically, it is precisely the harshness and unpleasantness of the living truth that allows beauty to shine forth and fulfill yet a higher function of art. This occurs only in great art, and only in its deepest and most hidden layers. In those layers we are no longer dealing with that which belongs to existing humanity in general, but with *the ideal of humanity*. Even more importantly, we are dealing with the most supreme of them all, *the ideal of an individual*.

Hartmann declares the ability to make what is great and ideal visible through the insignificant and common as the chief function of art. The presentation of the ugly and repulsive in the middle layers admits the appearance of the great and ideal in the deepest layers. In these deep layers we get a glimpse of what humanity could become, of what its true ideals are. In rare works of art, we go even further and glimpse an individual ideal. This is the same ideal that we sense in love, especially in radiant virtue and personal love.

To illustrate this point, let us return to *The Brothers Karamazov*. There is something akin to the shining of pure gold in the wisdom of Father Zosima and the purity of his pupil Alyosha. In Dmitry's love for Grushenka, in his struggles with poverty, unruliness and competition with his father for the heart of the same woman, we perceive an almost otherworldly devotion of one human being to another. Dmitry's character shines through with the brightest light of all in the culminating scene where he nearly kills his father (Smerdyakov does as soon as Dmitry leaves the house). He learns that Grushenka has been rejecting him because she has been waiting for her first love to reappear. When he finally comes, Dmitry realizes that for the sake of Grushenka's happiness he must "remove himself" by committing suicide. Just as he is about to make this sacrifice with the complete devotion of his soul, he gains Grushenka's love once and forever.

This drama would be enough for many artists, but Dostoevsky further intensifies it. Just a few hours after Dmitry receives the gift that his entire being craves most—Grushenka's love—he is accused of murdering his father. After a horrific examination that pinpoints him as the murderer, Dmitry, exhausted, falls asleep on top of a wooden chest and dreams of burned villages and starving children. (The living truth must never be left far behind for the ideal truth to shine forth.) He wakes up and finds that, while he was asleep, an unknown person placed a pillow beneath his head, despite his recent accusation. In gratitude for the simple and ultimately useless gesture of pity, Dmitry forgets about his accusation and the death of his father. This poorly educated, unruly, and sometimes immoral character realizes that spontaneous acts of human kindness are what elevates us to the highest levels.

Through this section, Dostoevsky shows the individual ideal of Dmitry in its most developed stage. Here Dostoevsky reaches the rare height of artistic creation. This point is easily missed because it occurs in the span of a few paragraphs in an 800-page novel. After many dramatic events, this seemingly anti-climactic point transpires, harmonizing all, from the words in the first physical layer to the deepest individual ideal of Dmitry in the most hidden spiritual layer.²

Hartmann rightly compares this moment of insight into the core of the character's personality to personal love. Only a person who sincerely cares for another, only one deeply in love, can see that: "He perhaps even loves only because he can see another human being in the light of the individual ideal, that is, in the ideality which distinguishes this person from any other.

² For further discussion, see Predrag Cicovacki, *Dostoevsky and the Affirmation of Life* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2012), 227–38.

It is unusual that even a poet is capable of such perception, and in this he is similar to a lover.”³ The poet may be in a more advantageous position than a lover, for he can love more than one character, while this love can be felt for only one person in real life.

Hartmann’s view is undoubtedly controversial. Be that as it may, he believes that only the living and essential truths combined establish what he calls an artistic truth. To miss either of these two fundamental truths, or to misrepresent their mutual relationship, leads to falsehood and poor art. A truth of art, then, emerges only with the satisfaction of these strict demands:

1. An artist must make visible the essential connections of human life, the real as well as only “possible” (or fictional) life.
2. An artistic truth must be carried out by the artistic form that establishes an apparent structural whole in accordance with the living truth.
3. This structural whole is manifested not only in some of the layers of the work of art, but in a work of art as a whole, in the unity of all of its diverse layers.

This is what it takes to establish a truth in art, and it also explains why this truth is rarely reached, only in the greatest art.

Now we are in a better position to understand why Hartmann finds it denigrating for the truth in art to be subsumed either under cognitive or ethical truth. The truth of art relies on cognitive and ethical truths and builds upon them. Nevertheless, it penetrates beyond, toward the highest degree of beauty: the sublime.

³ Hartmann, *Ästhetik*, ch. 12d, 179–80.

II.8

Sublime

There is no strict hierarchy in the galaxy of aesthetic values. Nonetheless, one value appears to shine more brightly than others: the sublime. All great and serious art, says Hartmann, strives toward and approaches the sublime.

The sublime is by no means limited to aesthetic values or aesthetic phenomena. The word “sublime” refers to all which, in accordance to its strength or greatness, (i) overwhelms every measure, (ii) creates in us the feeling of smallness and weakness, but also (iii) the awareness of spiritual elevation, and (iv) the feeling of security in front of the immeasurable.

Kant was among the first to connect wonder and awe to the experience of certain outstanding phenomena in nature that we call the sublime. It is not accidental that he illustrates the idea of sublimity with a great storm on a surging sea and an avalanche sweeping down a mountaintop. Other natural examples of the sublime are the stillness of a vast plain, or the dignity of the starry heavens above us, where the experience of sublimity is tied to the feeling of quiet lawfulness and unmistakable regularity of the virtually invisible movement.

The presence of something sublime in human life is frequently obscured because it is difficult to establish needed distance. A person who stoically suffers great pain can be sublime, just as it can be someone who sacrifices his good health or even life for a great cause. These cases of sublimity overlap with the moral realm. Also, they delve deeper toward clarifying the nature of the sublime than examples of the sublime in nature.

Hartmann does not surprise us when he says that the purest examples of the sublime can be found in the realm of myth and religion. The surprise comes when he adds that philosophical thinking that purports to give us a picture of the world as a whole may belong to this category. Although he does not clarify this remark, it is likely that he has the great thinkers of the past in mind, such as Spinoza and Leibniz, whom he greatly admires and whose thinking purports to penetrate into the deepest secrets of the universe in its wholeness.

The experience of the sublime is therefore not limited to our experience of art, and even within diverse forms of art we discover it in various degrees. In painting, the admixture of the sublime is accomplished both in some of the most ambitious projects (like Michelangelo's "Sistine Chapel") and the most penetrating portraits (such as the late self-portraits of Rembrandt). In literature, the most natural places to encounter the sublime are in great heroic epics (like Homer's), in which the destinies of heroes are so tragic that they outgrow human measure and form.

Hartmann recognizes even purer examples of the sublime in the nonrepresentational arts: in architecture and classical music. Architecture displays a static sublimity: in stillness, peace, and grandeur. As much as he admires the majesty of Gothic cathedrals, Hartmann goes as far as to say that the Doric temples of ancient Greece first attained the level of the sublime that, in their simplicity, have never been equaled.

The sublime in music is displayed in exactly the opposite way of architecture:

Music displays the sublime at the very depths of its spiritual dynamic, that is, at the points where no representation can reach. Music can express the sublimity of the soul, because it can "voice" it in an unmediated fashion. It can strike the resonant chords with the listener, grab him from within and enable him to feel the sublime in the same way in which he can feel only his experience—as his own.¹

This view stands in startling opposition to Kant, who has a low opinion of music. For him, music is an artificial play of sensations, which speaks to the senses only. Music lacks not only certain urbanity ("it can become obtrusive to others"), but, more importantly, it is deprived of thought. Kant wonders if music even belongs to fine arts, or whether it is "merely an agreeable art."²

For Hartmann, an avid cello player, music is the greatest of all arts. It is the only art that enters the deepest layers of the sublime. He singles out Bach's "Well-Tempered Clavier" as an example. Hartmann identifies the advantage of music in exactly the points Kant cites as its disadvantage:

The most amazing thing about music is that, in its outermost external layers, it is able to achieve an almost adequate expression for the

¹ Hartmann, *Ästhetik*, ch. 30b, 368.

² See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. W. Pluchar (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1987), sections 51–4; and Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, trans. Mary J. Gregor (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1974), sec. 71b.

sublime, which other arts cannot hope to do. This is possible in part because of the absolute freedom of the “play of forms” in tonal compositions—right up to the great harmonies of great works of music, and in part also because of the renunciation of any attempt at representation—for the contents, no matter how we recognize in them the movement of the soul, always hover in a characteristic indeterminacy, and only the character of their dynamism is expressed. This indeterminacy corresponds very precisely to the “obscurity” with which the sublime manifests itself.³

Despite their disagreement, Hartmann recognizes that Kant enhances our understanding of the sublime more than any other philosopher. Kant notes that the experience of the sublime arises whenever we confront an object that surpasses all means by which we can conceive it. As a result, we are unable to join these experiences in a bounded whole, either intuitively or conceptually. In this kind of experience we, as finite physical beings, feel overwhelmed by the grandeur of the perceived object (or event). At the same time, we feel exalted above all finite and conditioned beings, through the discovery that this grandeur is rooted in the consciousness of our intelligible task. The wholeness cannot be given through the sensory experience, but has to be grasped by the faculty of reason.

Already convinced of the primacy of practical reason, Kant attempts to explain the experience of awe-inspiring phenomena in nature by relating them to man’s supersensible destiny: the experience of awe-inspiring phenomena can only be understood by relating them to the majesty of the moral law.

Hartmann finds Kant’s contribution significant, but with an orientation that is too narrow and misleading. Let us momentarily ignore that Kant relates our experience of wonder and awe to the moral and rational realms (we will return to this issue in the next section). What is more important to Hartmann’s discussion of the nature of the sublime is that Kant directs us too much toward the effects of the sublime on the human soul. For Kant, despite the immediate impression of the contrary, the sublime is disconnected from the natural world; it is related to the ultimate nature of the self. As a result, we learn far more about these effects of the sublime on us, than about the structure of an object we experience as sublime.

Hartmann offers his own analysis of the sublime in the following terms. The sublime is what is great and magnificent, regardless of its

³ Hartmann, *Ästhetik*, ch. 32a, 382. Notice how in Hartmann’s view “obscurity” may be something positive, in contrast to Descartes’s quest for “clear and distinct ideas.”

quantity. Also, it can be what is serious, festive, superior and penetrating into great depth. We consider that which appears closed in itself as superior, or as being internally perfect, in front of which we appear small and inadequate. The sublime always appears as great, either by its power or by its capability.

Kant believes that in the observation of something sublime there are two “feeling-moments” which are in a mutual struggle. There is a negative or repulsive moment, like the feeling of impotence or fear. Also, there is a positive or attractive moment that is founded in the negative moment.

For Hartmann, Kant’s view is similar to Aristotle’s attempt to ground moral virtue (something positive) on two extremes (too much and too little), which cancel themselves and lead us toward a “healthy” middle. It also parallels Hobbes’ conviction of the violent and unsociable nature of humanity. This eventually leads toward establishing a social contract and a positive form of social life, which Kant in his political essays characterizes as “unsociable sociability.”

Hartmann is in principle opposed to founding a positive value on a negative value. We will not go into his criticism of Aristotle or Hobbes here, but will limit our remarks to Kant’s conception of the sublime. The value of the sublime is not founded on a negative value. Nor is it based in the leveling of a positive value with its negative counterpart. The founding value need not be in the subject at all, despite the obsession of modern philosophers to look at the subject for a source of all values. A founding value is almost always in the object, as its own value, which we then experience as something simply great and superior.

Kant’s profound but not always correct remarks with regard to the nature of sublimity have inspired various kinds of speculative conclusions, which simply do not agree with the observable phenomena. As a result of his detailed analysis of the sublime, Hartmann establishes its five characteristics; the first three are negative and preliminary, while the last two are defining of sublimity in the positive sense:

1. There is no need to associate the sublime with the quantitative. It can indeed be quantitative, but the vast majority of cases deal with a greatness of a different kind, a more qualitative kind. This qualitative kind concerns what Kant treats as “the dynamically sublime in nature.”
2. The sublime should not be identified with the pressing, fearful, catastrophic, or anything negative in general. The negative moment does not make the core of our experience of the sublime. Quite the contrary to such pessimistic interpretations, our primary experience of the sublime is the positive experience of elevation and overcoming.

3. There is no need to relate the sublime to the transcendent and the divine, as is the case with Kant's idealistic and romantic successors. Although the sublime is experienced as overwhelming and superior, it is nevertheless experienced as something this-worldly and near us, natural and humanely approachable.
4. The founding moment of our experience of something sublime is based on a quality of the object. Hartmann considers the sublime as a quality of the object, insofar as we perceive it as something great and superior.
5. Instead of the feeling of inadequacy, while facing the sublime, there emerges in us a primordial feeling of concord, a feeling of harmony between something superior in the object and the spiritual need of the human heart.

Hartmann considers the last two points essential. In clarifying them, he leads us beyond the narrow bounds of aesthetics and toward something of the greatest importance for an overall understanding of our place and role in reality. On the basis of his considerations of the sublime, Hartmann maintains that, "From the primordial times, man feels attracted to what is great and superior. He can only make his way through life with a persistent longing for something imponderably imposing and excellent, and continually seek it out. When he finds it, his heart flies out to meet it."⁴

This, according to Hartmann's conviction, is the "basic law of all human beings," that is, all of those who have not yet been perverted by their education and the social form of life. Hartmann considers our tendency toward that which is perceived as great and superior among the "morally most beautiful features" of humanity. This tendency is not aesthetic in itself, but it easily transforms into an aesthetic perspective mixed with admiration and devotion.

"Greatness" emits a sort of primary magic. It has a "magnetic" effect that pulls the human heart toward itself. The unspoiled man carries this tendency to revere and live with the gaze directed toward something higher than him. This tendency reveals a primordial human need for meaning: "Everything that is great bestows meaning by itself. Dimly and not always clearly, man senses in it a secret depth and the source of something meaningful."⁵

Returning to the sublime for a moment, Hartmann defines it "as the appearing of something of overwhelming magnitude and superiority which cannot itself be given in the sensible foreground of the object, as long as this appearing corresponds to the spiritual need for greatness and

⁴ Hartmann, *Ästhetik*, ch. 31b, 375.

⁵ Hartmann, *Ästhetik*, ch. 31b, 375.

playfully overcomes the small-mindedness which resists it.”⁶ The sublime is the degree of beauty that corresponds to our deeply ingrained need for the great and superior; it is the beauty in the playful experience by which we are able to overcome the resistance of our small-minded interests and preoccupations. This experience is possible in our exposure to the great works of art (although it is not limited to them). In great works of art, there is harmony between the idea hidden in the deepest layers and the form of its appearing in the front layers. In its deepest layers, great art approaches and converges toward an ungraspable moral-metaphysical “something.” The ungraspable and yet discernible “something” cannot be captured by words. This convergence, Hartmann claims, is the convergence toward the sublime. The sublime is that degree of beauty in which the most inner layers have an unconditional dominance.

Hartmann states that in the experience of the sublime in great art “human thought must not say everything; it must not be entirely open and not everything should be shown. It is the mark of a far superior and purer art that it affects us only through appearance and that it uses words only as a stimulator of our imagination.”⁷

There are elements of great art in all profound thinkers. They arrive at the limits of that what can and cannot be said, of what can and cannot be expressed in thoughts and words.

Does Hartmann himself feel those limits? Does he reach the points where the best we can do is to stimulate our imagination and aim toward something inexpressible, something sublime? We can never know a definitive answer, but we can recall the Introduction to *Ethics*, where he claims that philosophy “signifies a new kind of love for the task in hand, a new devotion, a new reverence for what is great.”

Does Hartmann’s philosophy intend to merge cognitive, ethical, and aesthetic values? Or, rather, does it aim toward the establishment of some kind of aestheticism as the highest point of our philosophical endeavor?

⁶ Hartmann, *Ästhetik*, ch. 31c, 377.

⁷ Hartmann, *Ästhetik*, ch. 41c, 464.

Critique of Moralism

In his work, *On the Foundations of Ontology*, Hartmann has a section with the strange title: “The Nimbus of the ‘Sublime.’”¹ “Nimbus” means an aura of splendor about any person or thing. It also refers to a halo displayed in numerous frescos, icons, and paintings of the saints. The other noun in the title is in quotations, indicating that Hartmann is talking about pseudo-sublimity. He wants to call our attention to an aura of sublimity attached to something to which it does not belong. This section is part of a larger text that deals with the relationship of ideal toward real being. Since Plato’s time, philosophers have attached a special halo around ideal beings because of their a-temporality and unchangeability.

Hartmann does not deny that ideal beings, values included, are permanent. What he objects to is their treatment as higher forms of beings, as something “sublime.” Values as such, in their ideality, are not the highest forms of being. They are only the measure of the value of real beings. To attach the nimbus of sublimity to ideal beings means to devalue the real and neglect the beings that deserve our attentiveness and appreciation: the real individuals.

In ontology, the highest peak of the nimbus of “sublimity” is reached with the ontological arguments—“proofs”—for the existence of God. This weakest link of traditional ontology is masterfully exposed by Kant in the *Critique of Pure Reason*: this kind of fallacy consists in substituting the idea of being for being itself, a logical predicate for reality, essence for existence.

It is thus a great puzzle that Kant himself, in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, “postulates” the existence of God (and the immortality of the soul) as necessary for the completion of his moral project. As Schopenhauer reacts in jest, Kant reinserts through the back door what he so pompously kicks out through the front. He resorts to sophisms similar to the “proofs” of God’s existence that he previously exposed as untenable.

¹ Hartmann, *Zur Grundlegung der Ontologie*, ch. 50d, 290–2.

More importantly for this context, morality becomes so elevated for Kant that it turns into what I will call “moralism.” He attaches the aura of splendor to an abstract moral law. A moral agent becomes treated as an exemplification of practical reason, not as a living human being. Real human beings are only “crooked wood, out of which nothing straight can be made.”² Human passions, which drive our choices and behavior, are just “inclinations” we need to overcome. All moral behavior must not simply be in concordance with the moral law, but stem from the conception of the moral law. Intellectual theories and abstract constructions are put ahead of living human beings and their natural concerns. This is how morality turns into moralism.

While intellectualism is based on unfounded optimism, moralism is an expression of profound pessimism. This is pessimism with regard to the order and structure inherent in the world and, no less importantly, in human nature. Moralism is an over-reaction to the imperfections of the world and the contradictoriness of human nature. It is an impulse to restructure the flawed world and strengthen the “crooked wood” of humanity, once and forever. Moralism is an attempt to recreate the creation, so that those who behave virtuously are assured of a happy life.

Moralism is more than a moral phenomenon; it is a reflection of the modern way of life, of the attitudes of modern man toward himself and his world. Moralism finds its symbolic expression in the conception of man as a *homo faber*, man the toolmaker, and the development of technology and industry. As the dominant activity of modern man, Arendt singles out fabrication: the making of artifacts, of something that does not exist in nature and that can only serve human needs and purposes. She clearly sees the other side of this attitude as well. Arendt calls it by its Latin name: *contemptus mundi*; contempt for the world as it is, as opposed to an attitude of acceptance and appreciation of that same world.

Arendt correctly characterizes moralism as an attempt to fabricate reality. When all such fabrications fail to deliver the expected harmony of the world and happiness for virtuous persons, modern man turns toward despair. The attempts to control reality and arrange it in accordance with our “sublime” ideals bring the world to the brink of self-destruction. Modernism turns into postmodernism—a rejection of the search for truth and the relativization of values. If values can be founded neither in God’s revelation nor in human creativity, it appears that values cannot be anything but arbitrary and relative. In this poisonous atmosphere

² Immanuel Kant, “Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View,” in L. W. Beck (ed.), *Kant: Selections*, (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1988), 419.

of relativism and subjectivism, the best option seems to be an escape from reality. In the twentieth century, the escape manifested itself in the abandonment of individuality and the merging into a herd of men. In the twenty-first century, due to an unprecedented development of digital technology, the preferred form of escape is turning toward virtual reality.

What does Hartmann have to offer instead of moralism?

To appreciate his offer, first recall how he reacts to intellectualism. The essence of his view is summed up in a poignant statement: being itself is disharmonious, and conflict is the form of its being. There are inevitable conflicts and tensions in the realm of being, which is why we encounter aporias and antinomies when dealing with ontological and epistemological issues. The presence of such conflicts and tensions does not prevent the possibility of order and structure, but it does exclude a possibility of the entirely harmonious existence.

There is a significant analogy between Hartmann's responses to intellectualism and moralism. Conflicts and antinomies of values are undeniable facts of human life. They do not present us the choices between one positive and one negative value, but instead between two positive (or two negative) values. They cannot be resolved without violating one of the values. Some of the conflicts we face in real life are so complex that the choice is far from clear. In those cases we have to rely on our feeling of value, on personal and collective experience, and a careful perception of the context. The expectation of a harmonious way of life, for example, the one in which virtue and happiness will be fully proportionate to each other, is wishful thinking. It is an unfounded expectation that fuels our utopian dreams and reformist attempts that are doomed to fail. Just as intellectualism is a distortion of reality by imposing on it categories that do not apply to it, moralism is an attempt to turn reality into what it is not and what it cannot become.

For Isaiah Berlin, the inescapable presence of value conflicts, together with the horrible track record of their attempted resolutions, is the sure sign that life is essentially tragic. Not so for Hartmann. Human tragedy consists not in the presence of conflicts and violations of one of the values involved, but in ceasing to strive toward the best we can do. The best we can do does not mean choosing the right action, but consistently striving toward the highest way of life.

In ethics, Hartmann connects this striving with the search for meaning. In aesthetics, he ties it to the appreciation of the sublime. Although distinguishable, these two attitudes have much in common. He never tires of emphasizing the relevance of useless values in ethics. Useful values

are indispensable for the ordering and structuring of life, as well as the satisfaction of our practical needs. Order and structure, however, do not bring meaning. Satisfaction of practical needs sustains our existence, but it does not reveal to us its meaning. Useless values, for which Hartmann primarily has in mind various forms of love, are the ones that bestow a sense of meaning on our lives. They illuminate our existence in a different light and stimulate us to go on, fly higher and strive toward its most elevated peaks.

It is of the utmost importance for Hartmann that we can find examples of the highest and best not just in our thoughts, belief systems and works of art, but in nature as well. The sublime in nature is a special point at which we come back to the appreciation of reality. Put differently, we come back to this original sense of wonder, which Hartmann believes is of essence not only for philosophy but also for our humanity. The meaning we discover through the experience of love and sublimity is a meaning without closure and definiteness. Paradoxically put, it is “meaning without meaning,” or “meaningless meaningfulness.” This meaning is something fluid, clearly felt yet impossible to articulate either in cognitive definitions or moral precepts. It does not exclude conflicts, struggles, disappointments, or sufferings. Nevertheless, it inspires rather than to prescribe. It leads, guides, elevates, and makes us fully alert, appreciative and alive, without explaining, demanding, or commanding. This meaning is not something we earn, deserve, or control. It is a gift.

If philosophy is the analysis of wonder, then the analysis part of it deals more with structure and order, with useful values and the necessities of life. The wonder part deals with meaning, with useless values, with love and the sublime, with the appreciation of the miracle of existence. In Hartmann’s ontology and epistemology, analysis prevails. In ethics and aesthetics, wonder plays a more prominent role. Those who know only his ontological and epistemological writings are exposed to the mere skeleton of his philosophy. When we come to ethics and aesthetics, we immediately face an embodied living being and miraculously fascinating world. As Hartmann promises at the beginning of his *Ethics*, “For to [new ethics] the world which [it] will open is once more great, as a whole and in its smallest part, and is filled with treasure, unexhausted and inexhaustible.”³

Philosophy as a whole, ontology and epistemology, ethics and aesthetics, is the analysis of wonder and the relearning of how to appreciate the miracle of existence. Or, we can now also say, it is a rediscovery of reality. According to Hartmann, philosophy consists in allowing reality to show itself, rather

³ Hartmann, *Ethik*, Introduction, sec. 8 [I, 46].

than be forced into our intellectual and moral constructs. Justification, evidence, proofs, and rationalization have become more important than truth in the Western philosophical tradition. The focus of Hartmann's philosophy shifts back to truth and the grasp of what is, whether by rational or irrational means. He redirects us from an attempt to capture the real into our rational nets to the appreciation of how much in the real world is wonder-full.

This world of wonder, "filled with treasure, unexhausted and inexhaustible," is not a world without bewildering conflicts and unsolvable antinomies. Nor is it a world without evil and ugliness, injustice, and disproportion. In fact, what can make this world appear unjust and disproportionate to the highest degree are our expectations of a reality without conflicts and struggle.

Hartmann shows that, just as there is one step from the great to tragic, it takes only one slip from the sublime to ridiculous. The pretention of greatness "is the highest and the most comprehensive. This pretention is the easiest one to fail and the possibility of making a slip is the greatest."⁴

A fall from the greatest and the sublime happens so often that it is easy to sink into pessimism, resignation, or indifference. In Hartmann's judgment,

Not only is modern man restless and precipitate, dulled and blasé, but nothing inspires, touches, lays hold on his innermost being. Finally he has only an ironical and weary smile for everything. Yes, in the end he makes a virtue of his moral degradation. He elevates the *nil admirari*, his incapacity to feel wonder, amazement, enthusiasm and reverence, into a planned habit of life. . . . This morbid condition is typical. It does not appear today for the first time in history. But whenever it has made its appearance, it has been a symptom of weakness and decadence, of inward failure and general pessimism.⁵

From the nimbus of the "sublime," which ascribes the aura of splendor to something that does not deserve it, we sink into pessimism that ironically laughs at everything great and sublime. From having ideals not corresponding to reality, we come to having no ideals at all.

Is there any solution for this rollercoaster, which continues to run throughout the history of the human race? How can we "attempt to coordinate the real in the light of the ideal," when the ideal itself is so problematic?

⁴ Hartmann, *Ästhetik*, ch. 32c, 389.

⁵ Hartmann, *Ethik*, Introduction, sec. 8 [I, 44-5].

Part III

Personality

“The world is not ordered toward man, but he is ordered toward the world.”

Hartmann

III.1

The Realm of Real Being and the Realm of Values

Jaspers argues that, “The depth of philosophical thinking is disclosed by the way in which it mediates between the oppositions it sets up.”¹ The central opposition in Hartmann’s philosophical opus is that between the realm of real being and the realm of values. He does not allow the chasm between them to become insurmountable; after all, values are also beings, ideal rather than real. Nevertheless, the tension between the two persists. The fact that Hartmann never dedicates any work to the resolution of this tension only contributes to it. Despite being the most systematic of all twentieth-century philosophers, Hartmann never shows in detail how to establish a bridge between these two realms. He never creates a mosaic providing an overview of his entire work, a key to understanding his philosophy.

Despite this deficiency, it is clear that mediation between the two realms is accomplished in human beings only insofar as they are considered as persons. Now it is up to us to piece together this mosaic, as much as we can, by scrounging through his opus, specifically *Ethics*, *Aesthetics*, *The Problem of Spiritual Being*, *On the Foundations of Ontology*, and *New Ways of Ontology*.²

The nature of personality is a topic of great significance for us. We live in a time of disturbing moral and spiritual decline, when the sense of human personality and dignity is obscured and we seem to swing from the wildest enthusiasm to utter despair. If philosophy can help us understand what personality is and delineate the legitimate aspirations and unavoidable restraints of persons, then philosophy may play a major role in

¹ Karl Jaspers, “Descartes and Philosophy,” in *Three Essays: Leonardo, Descartes, Weber*, trans. R. Manheim (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1964), 105.

² For Hartmann’s description of his own philosophical opus, see “Systematische Philosophie in eigener Darstellung,” in Schwarz Hermann (ed.), *Deutsche systematische Philosophie nach ihren Gestaltern*, (Berlin: Junker und Dünnhaupt, 1931), Vol. I, 454–71.

our orientation in reality. Let us briefly reconstruct how we came into this impasse, and carefully consider what we can learn from Hartmann about the nature and value of personality.

The modern turn toward the subject made things easier only on the surface. It developed from Descartes and Locke's understanding of human beings in terms of the split between mental and material substances. The dubious ontology of substances was virtually rejected after Hume's skepticism and Kant's "transcendental turn." As often happens when a well-entrenched view is repudiated, understanding the nature of human personality in positive terms becomes increasingly problematic: Should we understand it as Kant's "rational moral agent"? Hegel's "spirit"? Husserl's "transcendental ego"? Heidegger's "*Dasein*"? Scheler's "person"?

Scheler offers an appropriate diagnosis of both the spirit of the age and the state of philosophy when he professes: "Man is more of a problem to himself at the present time than ever before in all recorded history."³

Hartmann is unimpressed by the profusion of various anthropological and existentialist attempts to come to terms with this problem. Those random and disconnected approaches treat man as if he were some kind of uprooted and isolated being, with an unlimited capacity for shaping his own destiny and recreating the creation in his own image. In Hartmann's uncompromising judgment, these attempts are nothing but the expression of an "anthropocentric megalomania."⁴

Hartmann's view is based on the following crucial insight: the position and role of man in the cosmos can only be securely delineated if approached through careful analysis of the ontological and the axiological realms. He is aware that the difficulties we encounter in dealing with the mutual relationship of ontology and axiology are not negligible. If ontology is superior to axiology, then we do violence to the nature of values and virtually eliminate the possibility of freedom; in the ontologically determined world, man becomes a speck of dust, an ephemeral, negligible phenomenon. If, by contrast, axiology is dominant over ontology, the whole natural basis of the world and of humanity is ignored, and the problem of freedom seems equally unsolvable. In the teleologically determined world, all reality from the beginning to the end must conform to some predetermined valuational

³ Max Scheler, *Man's Place in Nature*, trans. Hans Meyerhoff (New York: Noonday Press, 1979), 4. For the philosophical climate in the 1920s, see Peter E. Gordon, *Continental Divide: Heidegger, Cassirer, Davos* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).

⁴ See Hartmann, *Ethik*, ch. 17e [I, 243]. See also *Ethik*, ch. 21c [I, 288–9], Hartmann's review of the development of anthropology in "German Philosophy in the Last Ten Years," and Hartmann, *Teleologisches Denken*, ch. 13c, 130–2.

principles and man's action is thus superfluous. Indeed, the very existence of man is superfluous, for the values prevail and determine reality with or without man's consciousness of it.

Ontology and axiology cover two aspects of being that have different yet complementary roles. Real being grounds everything there is, and therefore plays an important role in understanding the nature and position of man in the universe. Ideal being enables the possibility of meaning through the actualization of values in real being. Man stands at the crossroads of real and ideal being; he mediates between the two realms. His role and his destiny are framed in this mediating role, balancing the firm ground below and the starry heavens above. This mediating position "gives neither ontological priority to axiology nor primacy to practical reason. All that it really justifies is an axiological primacy of the ideal sphere, in contrast to the ontological primacy of the real sphere."⁵

As a natural being, man is subject to ontological determinations. These determinations, thorough as they are, nevertheless allow novelty at every higher stratum. The categorial dependency of the higher on the lower strata does not preclude the possibility of new elements on a higher level. Thus, a conscious subject can become a spiritual being (or a person). This ontological insight is critical to Hartmann; although a person can never be reduced to a conscious subject, there can be no personality that is also not a conscious subject.

Surprisingly, this fundamental realization was forgotten or overlooked by Scheler, who otherwise praises the results of Hartman's ontology. Carried on the wings of his extraordinary mind, Scheler violates it not only when he argues that persons cannot be conceived as objects, but even more so when he speaks of God as a person.

Hartman vehemently opposes any attempt to personify God. Making a definitive statement about God is claiming to know what can never be an object of definitive thought; speaking of God in this way is assuming familiarity with that what is most unknown and most impenetrable. It is no less problematic to speak of God as a person. Like Kant (in the Transcendental Dialectic of his *Critique of Pure Reason*), Hartmann maintains that we have no cognitive grounds either to affirm or to deny the possibility of God as a person. What we can know is that the postulation of God as a person (who at the same time is not a subject) violates the ontological laws: "Personality exists only on a basis of subjectivity, just as

⁵ Hartmann, *Ethik*, ch. 17e [I, 243]. See Hartmann, *Neue Wege der Ontologie*, chs. 4, 11; and *Das Problem des geistigen Seins*, ch. 14f, 159–61.

subjectivity exists only on a basis of organic life, and life only on a basis of the whole subordinate uniformity of nature.”⁶

Let us assume that such an ontological determination holds and look at the nature of personality from the opposite direction. What kind of novelty does personality represent in comparison to a subject? Hartmann relates personality to the highest strata of spiritual being. Recall that according to his ontology not every spiritual being is a person: the so-called objective spirit and the objectified spirit are not persons. Only individual, living beings can be persons. Speaking in the context of moral values, Hartmann maintains that, of all real entities, only a moral subject can stand enraptured with the ideal world of values. He is also the only real entity that has the capacity to “communicate” these values to a reality that does not incorporate them. A person is only the subject who can, in this way, bring the ontological and the axiological realms together.

Thus, there is a double determination that alone allows a subject to become a person, an ontological determination from below and an axiological determination from above:

A personal being is metaphysically possible only at a boundary line between ideal and real determination—that is, at the point of their reciprocal impact, their opposition and their union, only at the connecting point of two worlds, the ontological and the axiological. The intermediate position between the two, the non-merging of either into the other, as well as participation in both, is the condition of personality.⁷

Hartmann insists that our usual intellectualistic and moralistic approaches misrepresent the position of personality between the two realms. The mere intellectual discernment of values is not sufficient. Without our acting on the proper insight and living in accordance with it, mere knowledge of values remains impotent. What is more, the very possibility of knowledge of values itself is impossible without a prior orientation, which rests upon a more fundamental inner attitude that guides the comprehension and selection of values.

Merely choosing and acting are also not constitutive of personality. The expression “freedom of the will” is too narrow and does not reflect

⁶ Hartmann, *Ethik*, ch. 24d [I, 326]. For further discussion of God and religion in relation to ethics, see Hartmann’s outstanding closing chapter of *Ethik*, ch. 85 [III, 260–74].

⁷ Hartmann, *Ethik*, ch. 19g [I, 268].

prior commitment and inner attitude that lead to selections and actions. “Freedom of the will” scratches the surface of the moral life. It plays a constitutive role only in the ethics narrowly focused on the “ought to do” and the relationship of means and ends. Hartmann’s distinction between “ought to be” and “ought to do” points toward more fundamental dispositions and capacities needed before we reach the level of choosing and acting.

There are two related but different elements that constitute the personality: freedom in the more fundamental sense and the carrying of moral values. Instead of freedom of the will, Hartmann prefers to talk about moral freedom: a personal entity is a free entity. Values do not coerce the person. Even when they are comprehended, they impose a claim on a person that leaves him free to address the values in accordance with his inner constitution, attitudes, intentions, and the context in which he finds himself. Of decisive significance is that the value of intention (or moral freedom) is distinguished from the intended value (which he associates with the freedom of the will). Only the former makes the person a carrier of moral values.

Like Kant, Hartmann considers a person to be a citizen of two worlds. For him, they are not the phenomenal and the noumenal worlds. They are the realms of real and ideal being, which intertwine and influence each other through him: “The life of a person is a single unbroken chain of situations in which he must find his way.”⁸ This single unbroken chain is the inner pole of personality, the unity of a person’s manifold and changeable commitments. These commitments are tested and the person’s character is revealed through his activity, suffering, moral strength, freedom of the will, foresight, and purposive efficiency. Behind all these various manifestations we find the inner core, the self-synthesis that is, at the same time, continuously self-transcending as well. How this is all done, we can neither fully comprehend nor rationally explain. We only know that, as a unity of commitments, personality gives expression to the virtually inexhaustible complexity of man’s being.

⁸ Hartmann, *Das Problem des geistigen Seins*, ch. 12b, 133. For further discussion, see ch. 14f, 159–61 of the same work, and *Ethik*, ch. 78c [III, 177–8].

III.2

Personality as a Value

One of Hartmann's central intentions in regard to personality is to establish its ontological rootedness in the life cycle. His objective goes even further, for there is a double-bind on personality: not just the rootedness in the real world, but also a fundamental orientation toward the realm of values. Personality is the mediator between the two worlds. Is personality itself also something valuable?

This depends on many factors, the central of which we will discuss later. First, we must make some preparatory considerations.

According to Hartmann's careful delineation of the realms of real and ideal being, no real entity need be valuable by itself; being does not imply value. It is different when a real entity is an actualization of an ideal being. The reality of a (positive) value is itself a value. This is not the end of the story, however, because the nonreality of a value can also be valuable. It can be valuable insofar as it stimulates us to live in a way that will bring us closer to the realization of that value. Let us clarify these views by turning once more to Kant.

Kant's consideration of personality falls within the framework of modern philosophy, yet it also has its peculiar characteristics. Following a broadly Christian tradition, Kant accepts the fundamental dualism in human nature and associates the seat of personality with the soul, not with the body. Under the influence of Descartes, the focus narrows from the soul to the mind, and many modern philosophers base ethics on the philosophy of mind. In accordance with the modern preoccupation with the mind, Kant's understanding of personality can be linked with the transcendental unity of apperception, or the unity of all theoretical and/or practical activity. Perhaps, most importantly of all, it can be understood in terms of moral autonomy.

We have already indicated in the previous section why a naïve dualism of the body and the soul would not work, and also why freedom of the will (and thereby autonomy) must be grounded in deeper dispositions and

capacities. Kant answers the second of these concerns in his late work, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*. Here he discusses the concept of personality in the context of his consideration of several predispositions. (The term “predisposition” [*Anlage*] is Kant’s way of talking about basic human nature as it is prior to any actual exercise of freedom and autonomy.) The three original predispositions are those of animality, humanity, and personality. For Kant these predispositions correspond to: (i) physical love that provides for the preservation of the species; (ii) self-love that is both physical and rational, producing the inclination to “acquire worth in the opinion of others”; and (iii) “the capacity for respect for the moral law,” as sufficient incentive for the will.¹

Kant does not have much admiration for animality: “Life as such . . . has no intrinsic value at all . . . it has value only as regards the use to which we put it, the ends to which we direct it.”² Is it, then, humanity that deserves our respect? Or should we reserve this respect for personality only? This issue is not clearly resolved in Kant’s philosophy. It is only clear that humanity is a precondition for personality, or the state of morality, for Kant. Humanity in itself is not necessarily an actual moral state, but is at least required for its possibility. This possibility seems sufficient to assign to human beings what Kant considers as an absolute value: the value of dignity and autonomy.

If we choose to believe Kant, then our lives are transformed from no value at all (in the case of sheer animality) into something of absolute values (insofar as we are moral beings). In what exactly does this magical transformative value consist? Kant formulates his ideas regarding the value of human beings (as moral beings) in different ways. Most of them seem to converge to one critical point: respect for the moral law. In Lewis White Beck’s formulation:

Personality . . . is an Idea of reason, and personality is not given. We are persons, but no finite sensuous being is fully adequate to the Idea of personality. In human nature, considered empirically, we find at most only “a predisposition for personality,” which is the capacity for respecting the moral law and making it sufficient incentive for the will.³

¹ Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, trans. T. Greene and H. H. Hudson (LaSalle, IN: Open Court, 1960), 22–3.

² Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, sec. 66.

³ Lewis White Beck, *A Commentary on Kant’s “Critique of Practical Reason”* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 227.

Kant interprets the notion of personality as “an Idea of reason” in the following way: morality conceives of the world that does not yet exist in nature and seeks to actualize it by acting in the given world according to the laws of the possible one. In Kant’s words, “[the moral] law gives to the sensible world . . . the form of an intelligible world, that is, the form of supersensuous nature, without interfering with the mechanism of the former.”⁴

Hartmann could accept this view, not in terms of two parallel worlds, but in terms of their integration in the actual human being, which preserves both ontological and axiological determinations. Yet, Hartmann is unsatisfied with Kant’s shift toward respect for the moral law. In Kant’s words: “All respect for a person is properly only respect for the law . . . of which the person provides an example.”⁵ Hartmann does not understand how this respect applies to any person: How we can show this respect to another person?

Kant’s short answer is that the fundamental moral equality of all persons requires that they must all be treated in the same way. To Hartmann, this raises more questions than it provides answers: If respect is something other persons do not have to earn (simply because they are rational beings and moral agents), does that turn respect into a moral obligation? Must other persons always be respected? Must all persons always be respected? Must all persons be treated with equal respect, or is there a difference in the degree of respect? Must each person, in order to be respected, be treated in the same way? How about individual differences between persons? Or their actual behavior? Or the circumstances under which they act? Are they all irrelevant?

Hartmann pursues these questions more persistently than anyone else. He also comes up with some ingenious remarks worth mentioning here. While considering Kant’s treatment of persons in terms of the first formulation of the categorical imperative, he points out that,

[T]here is evidently something here which in principle man as a personality cannot will. Rather he must at the same time will that over and above all universal applicability there should be in his conduct something of his own, which no other in his position ought to do or need do. If he neglects this, he is a mere numeral in the crowd and

⁴ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. L. W. Beck (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill, 1956), 44.

⁵ Immanuel Kant, *Grounding of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. J. Ellington (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1974), 14n.

could be replaced by anyone else; his personal existence is futile and meaningless.⁶

In Hartmann's opinion, Kant's conception of moral equality levels out all individual differences and qualities. This conclusion would run contrary to both our intuitions and Kant's own intentions. First, if morality were to consist in nothing but the carrying out of a few general moral precepts or laws, then personal uniqueness, which always attempts something beyond such general precepts, would be utterly immoral. Instead of a genuine moral community, we would wind up having something similar to the world envisioned in Dostoevsky's "Grand Inquisitor." More than one totalitarian regime attempted to implement this vision in the twentieth century, and the results are all too familiar.

Second, Hartmann believes that this one-sided interpretation of the moral law would run contrary to Kant's vision of the categorical imperative. He does not believe that Kant intends to de-personalize and de-humanize the world; just the opposite. This is why Hartmann believes that Kant's law should say: "So act, that the maxim of your will could never become the principle of a universal legislation without a reminder." Alternatively, we can express it in this way: "Never act merely according to a system of universal values but always at the same time in accordance with the individual values of your own personal nature."⁷

There is clearly a conflict here. From Hartmann's statement, which is in the spirit of Kant, an antinomy arises that cannot fully be removed. Perhaps the most surprising aspect of this whole issue is that Hartmann does not believe that this antinomy creates any essential problem for Kant's account of persons and respect for the moral law. On the contrary, it complements Kant's account and makes it richer.

Here is how Hartmann comes to his conclusion. The real demand of Kant's categorical imperative is:

I ought so to will, as under literally the same circumstances everyone else ought to will. But "literally the same circumstances" includes the peculiar nature of my individual ethos. The imperative, accordingly, when the complete structure of the case is born in mind, not only

⁶ Hartmann, *Ethik*, ch. 57h [II, 357]. Scheler raises a similar criticism: "There can be no respect for a norm or a moral law which is not based on respect for a person who posits it—and ultimately is founded on love for the person as a model"; *Formalism in Ethics*, 560.

⁷ Hartmann, *Ethik*, ch. 57h [II, 357]. For further discussion, see a very important ch. 80 [III, 180–201] of *Ethik*.

excludes the moral justification of a will exactly the same in others, but it positively demands also the unique factor in my own will, without prejudice to the classification which brings my will and that of others under a rude uniformity of the ought. The ought allows unlimited scope for an individually articulated will.⁸

Hartmann concludes that individuality cannot and should not be excluded from moral considerations; nor can or should it be excluded from the proper understanding of what it means to be a person and how to show respect for other persons. The demands of the universal and personal must not clash because they operate on different levels. Morality is not based on a narrow, one-dimensional order of moral values, to be discerned by our deliberate reflection. Hartmann has three objections against such a conception of morality. First, the bounds of our deliberate reflection are surprisingly narrow. As our perception of the external world depends on a variety of emotional and intuitive elements, our sense of values depends not only on deliberate reflection but also on the individual and, for the most part, unconscious feeling of values. Second, our conscious and unconscious sensing of values is never complete. At most, at any given moment we can discern some fragments of the realms of values. Third, there is no definitive order or rank of values. We do not know how many of them may exist, but we are aware of only two such orders: one according to which values can be ordered from the strongest to the weakest, and the other that ranks them from the highest to the lowest. The values promoted by general laws—the values of equality, justice, and similar—belong to the strongest and lowest values. The values unique to individuals are, by contrast, the highest and the weakest.

What remains puzzling is how these two orders of values are to be unified together in every concrete situation. No recipe can provide a general once-and-for-all-solution for their unification. Hartmann frequently reminds us that, “moral life is life in the midst of conflicts.” In other words, moral life is “concentration upon them, a constructive solution of them through the commitment of the person; and all ignoring of it is a sin, an irrevocable injury to an ethical being—even to that of one’s own personality.”⁹

The value of personality is complex and two-sided. The two sides involve universality and individuality in a way that is peculiar for the nature of personality. On the one hand, the value of personality is *subjectively*

⁸ Hartmann, *Ethik*, ch. 57h [II, 359].

⁹ Hartmann, *Ethik*, ch. 33d [II, 94].

universal: it is valid for every subject that grasps values, although not every subject does. On the other hand, the value of personality is *objectively individual*: like aesthetic values, it is always a value of one single individual. Again, like aesthetic values, the value of personality is nevertheless a value that is objectively valid for anyone who grasps its unique meaning.

Hartmann has two more insights in connection with the nature of the value of personality. The more obvious of them is that the value of personality is independent of its actualization (or realization); like all other values, the value of personality has its ideal existence. The second and more important insight is that the value of personality is not attainable in the pursuit of itself, but only in the pursuit of other values. Next we will consider why this is so, and how exactly the value of personality can be realized.

III.3

Pseudo, Spurious, and Genuine Personality

When discussing the nature and value of personality, Hartmann often adheres to Max Scheler's views, which we will briefly examine, so that we may better understand Hartmann's own contribution to the subject.

For Scheler, the person is a concrete unity of acts of different types and nature. The person is present in all such acts, but cannot be reduced to any of them. The key question is not *what* a person is but *who* a person is. The answer to the second question can only be found through value insights, that is, by immediately and directly taking in the person's actions and lifestyle. Since an individual person is inseparable from his community and society, Scheler believes that we can only know him in the context of his larger cultural milieu. He opposes the Locke-inspired liberal individualism, in which all interpersonal relations are regarded as contractual and artificial. They are the relations formed for the benefit and interest of the so-called free and independent individuals. Private property is what separates: what is mine is not yours, and the other way around. Scheler holds that, while modern society is based on separation and distrust, a genuine human community is based on trust and mutual support. This is why, coupled with the rise of capitalism and the mechanization of nature, liberal individualism leads to the transformation of all forms of community into society. To counter this harmful trend of modern world, Scheler emphasizes love, as well as the relevance of certain communal units, such as nation, state, cultural circle, and, ultimately, humanity. In his view, the concept of personality is the culminating point that reminds us how deep and central the triangular nexus of individuality, community, and morality is.

Because Scheler's entire ethical system is centered on his conception of what it means to be a person, Hartmann calls it the ethics of "moral personalism." Despite his admiration for Scheler, he opposes this unjustified broadening of the concept of personality. Ascribing personality to "higher social units" is mistaken not only on ontological but also on axiological grounds. Individual inequality cuts deeper into the essence of a person than universal equality, defended by various "higher social units." What is more

important to Hartmann, no community is ever the carrier of full humanity. An individual is.

Hartmann had been appalled by two related phenomena that were clearly noticeable in the twentieth century: the dominance of social ethics, combined with the readiness of individuals to lose themselves in a mass of people. In Hartmann's lifetime, the state (and political institutions in general) assumed the role and authority over individuals and seduced them to take up various forms of intolerance and cruelty that, in its range and scale of destruction, outdid any other in the history of humanity. In our time, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, it is financial institutions and big corporations that have usurped the role of personalities and their power to dictate their own inhumane conditions to the rest of the world.

Hartmann categorically rejects this pseudo-personalization of "higher social units," as well as their abuses and irresponsibility. He is equally disgusted by the readiness with which the masses of people give up their individual personalities and merge themselves into the form of one mass movement or another.

The massive loss of individuality, and how readily it occurs, prompts a number of intellectuals, Scheler included, to discuss authentic personality and offer various classifications of persons. Following his own hierarchical order of values into the values of the holy, spiritual values, vital values, utility values, and pleasure values, Scheler articulates the corresponding types of persons: the saint, the genius, the hero, the leading spirit of civilization, and the artist of enjoyment.

Hartmann is not interested in such typologies. Personality is not only different in each individual, but ought to be different: "The specific direction of his nature actually exists only once, and only in him. In him the individual ethos entrenches itself upon the universal ethos."¹

The various types stand in the middle, between the individual and the universal. Hartmann advocates for the uniqueness of the valuational direction of every person, which gives him the right to pursue his own way and go beyond the mere type. This pursuit is both beneficial and harmful. It is beneficial because it allows the person to develop a unique valuation direction, to pursue a complex of values specifically related to his own person, to his own character and predispositions. This orientation is harmful because it can be pursued only in a limited range of values; every positive choice of values means at the same time an inevitable neglect of the whole range of values that have not been selected.

¹ Hartmann, *Ethik*, ch. 57d [II, 349].

Hartmann also neglects the typology of persons because the majority of people have “little personality”—they differ from a type only slightly. And yet, “the strict sense of personality applies solely to the uniqueness and differentiation of that valuational complex that constitutes in a man’s ethos the preferential trend of his inner disposition. Only through such a trend does a man really rise above the ought to be that applies to everyone.”²

Hartmann does not imply “heroes” either in Scheler’s narrow sense of the word, or in a broader, generally accepted sense, when he speaks about a developed individual personality. Usually, hero is simply a more extreme expression of a general type of person. Hartmann does not believe that genuine personality is to be looked for among famous persons. The essence and true significance of personality consist in inner greatness.

Personality increases or decreases depending on the amount of individuality (ranging from the typical to the highly unique) and the degree of approximation of the actual person to his ideal ethos. We constantly look at “rich and famous” as the exemplary models of personalities because the first of these two aspects appears to be more important to us than the second. We judge persons by the criteria imposed upon them from the outside, which measure certain personal traits against others, whether average or exceptional in some ways. A person is not genuine, however, because he is better or more successful than others according to an arbitrarily and externally determined standard. He is genuine owing to his ability to approximate his ideal ethos. This does not exclude the first aspect (the amount of individuality), because Hartmann thinks that both are relevant to a genuine personality:

Whoever is really a marked personality, carries his standards beyond all questions in himself; in following them he is loyal to himself. He shows very definite and unmistakable sympathies and antipathies, for which he can give no other account than that which is to be found in their existence and their felt necessity. He sees the world in a light of his own, as no one else sees it, in the light of his preferred values; and lives in accord with them. He is a world for himself, in the true sense of the word.³

Here we encounter another paradox, which further illuminates the difference between spurious and genuine personality. All of us need to develop our personality; all of us have to attempt to realize our ideal ethos

² Hartmann, *Ethik*, ch. 57f [II, 353–4].

³ Hartmann, *Ethik*, ch. 57f [II, 354].

to the greatest possible degree. Yet, a self-conscious attempt to become a genuine personality almost certainly prevents us from developing it. There can be no specific “ought to do” regarding the development of personality. Further, there should be little conscious effort to initiate this development. “Personality . . . as a value is never by its very nature actualized in reflection upon itself, but in reflection upon other values.”⁴ There cannot be a conscious imitation of another genuine personality. One who merely copies is not a personality. Rather, he is a destroyer and falsifier of his own true personal ideal. He is not a man, but a human ape.

The paradox is that, while it is a definitive ideal to develop one’s personality and a sin not to do so, this development can be neither deliberate nor based on imitation. There cannot be a rational formula for how one goes about developing one’s own personality; the value of personality cannot be understood explicitly, because it is essentially irrational. One’s personality can be developed only by following one’s own feeling of value and aprioristic insight. To prevent an overly Platonic interpretation of his view, Hartmann warns us not to forget that our a priori discernment of values and of our individual ideal is never unconnected to our experience of the actual, and can succeed only when connected to it. The actuality experienced is the occasion that incites the mind to the beholding of values and ideals.

Hartmann stops his discussion of the value of personality abruptly in order to consider personal love, which we have covered (see II.4). The continuation of his thought on personality is in the chapter on wisdom. This is not accidental: wisdom is an art of living, and developing a genuine personality certainly requires an art of living. With the intention of continuing this discussion, we will turn to Hartmann’s thoughts on wisdom.

Throughout his opus, Hartmann criticizes the exaggerations of intellectualism and moralism. He carries this elegantly out in his chapter on wisdom, where he states that wisdom is something that has been repeatedly obscured in one or both of these ways.

Going against Aristotle’s overly intellectualistic interpretation of wisdom as “dianoetic” virtue, Hartmann points out that wisdom has only peripheral contact with the intellectual values of insight, truth, and knowledge. Aristotle brings wisdom too close to contemplative self-indulgence and unpractical remoteness from the world. In contrast, Hartmann insists that wisdom must be in complete accord with the world, because it is the sense of everything that contains value.

⁴ Hartmann, *Ethik*, ch. 57i [II, 362]. This attitude is similar to Hartmann’s distinction between *intentio recta* and *intentio obliqua*.

Nor should wisdom be interpreted moralistically, as in the example of prudence. Taken by itself, prudence is nothing more than worldly shrewdness. In contrast, wisdom has to do with our fundamental moral commitment. Wisdom is a primal moral disposition, a commitment of a person to the richness of life in general, including his own and the lives of others.

This conception is far-off from anything we read about wisdom in textbooks of philosophy. In fact, it has nothing in particular to do with philosophy in any narrow, technical sense of the word. It concerns our overall orientation toward life. Hartmann believes that his interpretation is not a deviation but a return to the original meaning of wisdom in the early Greek and Roman traditions. In Latin, *σοφία* is rendered as *sapientia*, which, again, should not be interpreted in any intellectualistic or moralistic way. *Sapientia* is “moral taste”: a capacity “directed toward fullness of life” and “an affirming, evaluating attitude toward whatever is of value.”⁵ Wisdom is nothing but “ethical spirituality, the attitude of the ethos as the ultimate spiritual factor in humanity, dominating the whole life.”⁶

To those familiar with Hartmann’s ontological works alone, this conception of wisdom may seem surprising, even strange. This impression can be justified only through a limited acquaintance with his philosophy. Despite the occasional impressions to the contrary, Hartmann is not an analytic philosopher and he never aims to turn philosophy into an imitation of science. He is also not a continental philosopher, especially in terms of the existentialists’ obsession with death. Hartmann is a philosopher preoccupied with life, with the richness and fullness of life, with its beauty and sublimity. He understands philosophy as the analysis of wonder, as the rational penetration into the miracle of existence, with all of its nuances and complexities. This, he thinks, is the authentic conception of philosophy that we find exemplified in the pre-Socratics and especially in the first true master of philosophy, Socrates. The Socratic ideal of examined life is what guides Hartmann in his overall philosophical endeavor, as well as his attempt to understand the development of personality and the nature of wisdom.

According to Hartmann, Socratic self-knowledge is the first fruit of this spiritual attitude toward life that we call wisdom:

It signifies knowledge exactly at that point where it is most difficult, where all our natural tendencies check objectivity of knowledge—knowledge

⁵ Hartmann, *Ethik*, ch. 45a [II, 239].

⁶ Hartmann, *Ethik*, ch. 45a [II, 239].

of one's own ethical non-being, failure and shortcoming. The ethical import of this knowledge can be measured by the value of that which it brings with it, the right appreciation of the moral life which is demanded, the appreciation of what a man ought to be.⁷

In this sense (and in this sense alone), the Socratic connection between virtue and knowledge can be justified. It should not, however, lead toward an exaggerated identification of virtue with knowledge. No insight into the nature of the good is sufficient to make a person good, for in a genuine personality any such insight must be reinforced by volition, determination, active energy, and self-mastery.

Wisdom lies in the same direction as goodness, but they do not coincide. Plato understands the Socratic wisdom in the right way when he points out the domination of values in their ideality (as Ideas). Wisdom and virtue are inseparably connected to the *beholding of Ideas* in such a way that a person beholding them sees in their light everything that he encounters and all his endeavors in life.

The wise man carries into all the relations of life the standards of value which he possesses in his spiritual "taste," he saturates his outlook upon life with them. This domination of values does not come to him by way of reflection, or through knowledge of commandments, but is an immediate, intuitive, emotionally toned domination, which from the centre of moral perception penetrates all unobserved and impulsive excitations, and is there already alive in them.⁸

How different is this from any typology of persons and our usual ideas of heroes and great men! How different is this from all intellectualistic and moralistic attempts to force upon us their conceptual schemes and moral precepts! Everything in Hartmann's description sounds simple and natural, just as it seems when we imagine the historical Socrates in his usual dialogical encounters. Wisdom is that core of personality, its unifying and valuational principle that colors everything a person observes and does. To become a genuine personality is to become wise in this original, Socratic sense. As Hartmann articulates it,

For the wise man the intuitive grasping of the situation is in part determined by this wider perspective, by that of the Idea. The

⁷ Hartmann, *Ethik*, ch. 45b [II, 240].

⁸ Hartmann, *Ethik*, ch. 45b [II, 241].

understanding of the significance of a situation depends upon the perspective in which it is seen. The larger the perspective, the deeper the insight into the situation. Ethical divination is the bestowal of meaning. For at bottom it is the living sense of value—but obscure, foreboding, not yet clear as to content. With a thousand tentacles the wise man reaches out beyond himself and his own limited understanding; he does not live in what he already knows of himself, but always a span beyond. This is the strict meaning of *sapientia*.⁹

This, we can add, is also the precise meaning of genuine personality.

⁹ Hartmann, *Ethik*, ch. 45b [II, 241].

III.4

Fulfillment of Personality

The time has come to tie together some of the loose ends of Hartmann's philosophy, for which Hartmann himself is responsible, having abandoned the big picture in favor of focusing on finer points. These loose ends include Hartmann's ideas of personality, personal love, radiant virtue, wisdom, the richness of experience and moral sublimity, and they are all connected in his idea of the fulfillment of personality.

Hartmann's new ontology explains the embodiment of personality in the ontological world. In connection with his axiology, it offers a new understanding of the unique richness and depth of human personality that emerges as a manifestation of its real, although limited, novelty and autonomy. Grounded in the strata of real being and positioned at the spiritual level of that structure, a human person is the only being capable of responding to the world in a way that brings about the realization of values and bestows meaning.

Hartmann's ontologically and axiologically structured world is the cosmos of virtually inexhaustible complexity, richness, and depth. The human person is the mediator between the two realms of being, an imperfect intermediary who in this process can be creative or not, autonomous or not. However, he is also more than just a mediator. Personality is a value or, to express it differently, a task. As a value, personality is not something given but has to be realized and fulfilled. Hartmann has no "democratic" illusion that every human being eventually develops his personality. He argues, nevertheless, that the longing for personal fulfillment is one of man's most intense impulses. He adds that, "the mystery of love is that it satisfies this deepest and least understood craving."¹

What Hartmann has in mind is personal love, which he puts on the highest pedestal. The value of personal love is complementary to personality, which Hartmann describes in almost poetic terms. He speaks of it as the divination of the Ideal of a particular individual. Hartmann ties the

¹ Hartmann, *Ethik*, ch. 58a [II, 369].

penetrating glance and intuitive knowledge of love with seeing “the perfect in the imperfect” and “the infinite in the finite.”

What takes place here is [simply] marvelous. The intuitive glance forces its way, as it were, through the actual personality, it breaks through the boundaries of the empirical man and beholds something different, which in the man himself is only intimated. To the intuitive glance the personality is transparent. But what shines through it is its ideal essence, its true ethos, the value which is its inner destiny, its intelligible character.²

Another way to think about the fulfillment of personality through love is to point out that in our nature there is a need to be loved. This is a genuine need, perhaps our deepest need, especially in view of the urge to give and bestow love and help another human being fulfill his own most primordial longing.

Is (personal) love then “all you need”?

While Hartmann’s text may appear to suggest this, we should be cautious about this conclusion. Throughout his writings, Hartmann warns of the danger of one-sidedness and a need for synthesis and complementarity. Values are no exception to this rule. In one typical passage Hartmann reproaches Nietzsche’s one-sided criticism of Christianity’s brotherly love:

He rightly saw that love of the far distant is the higher moral value. Yet he was at the same time wrong; for brotherly love is the “stronger” value. The mistake of Christianity is the belief that the fulfillment of the moral life depends upon brotherly love alone. Nietzsche’s mistake is to suppose that love of the far distant is possible without a basis in brotherly love, that its aims are in themselves sufficient. Only in their synthesis is to be found the reciprocal content of both ideals. But to discern the synthesis is a task of far greater magnitude than to attach oneself to the one side and despise the other.³

When emphasizing the relevance of personal love, Hartmann may sound as one-sided about the subject as Christianity and Nietzsche. To his credit, his text permits the possibility of a different reading. For instance, in the last sentence of the chapter on personal love, he writes: “Thus personal love, *like radiant virtue*, gives an ultimate meaning to life; it is already

² Hartmann, *Ethik*, ch. 57k [II, 366].

³ Hartmann, *Ethik*, ch. 63i [II, 463].

fulfillment in germ, an uttermost value of selfhood, a bestowal of import upon human existence – useless, like every genuine self-subsistent value, but a splendor shed upon our path.”⁴

Radiant virtue now enters into the same picture as personal love. It is a bestowing virtue, a giving form of love, sometimes described similarly to personal love. Hartmann maintains, for instance, that “radiant virtue is a power of the ethos, it instills the Ideal into the race.” As in the case of personal love, “here the real anticipates the Ideal, a living proof that the Ideal is possible in the world of actuality.”⁵

A large part of our trouble with radiant virtue is its name. We do not immediately see how it connects to love, and Hartmann does not provide sufficient indication that it is closely related to wisdom. Yet, radiant virtue is a form of love, directed from inside out, but not at any one human being in particular. Like the sun, the person of radiant virtue shines with love and the appreciation of life, with the light that spreads to others and enriches their lives.

It is certainly worthy to note that Hartmann refers to Socrates as the exemplification of these virtues in the chapters on radiant virtue and wisdom. In both cases, the carrier of virtue is described as “the born friend,” “the spiritual helper,” “the moral leader,” and “the educator.” He educates others that “the highest value of life is inevitably a spending of life.”⁶

On the topic of wisdom, Hartmann points to an underlying “intelligent optimism” of a wise man and the attitude of appreciation in “the presence of inexhaustible riches” in life. Like radiant virtue and personal love, wisdom is by no means exhausted in right action. Its essence is the right disposition, the right attitude: “Calmness and clearness of vision, a loving recognition of the individuality and intrinsic merit of others, are the extreme opposite of the hunt for happiness, and therefore of any sort of eudemonism proper.”⁷ In the case of the wise man, we sense the tendency to be independent of external goods and a grasp of reality guided by the sense of highest values. Also, we sense pure joy in everything that is worthy of joy, together with a deep sentiment of gratitude and a profound sense of reverential wonder at the richness of life.

What Hartmann means when he talks about radiant virtue and wisdom is “love of the world.” Likely he avoids this phrase because it plays a prominent role in Scheler’s philosophy, although Scheler interprets it in

⁴ Hartmann, *Ethik*, ch. 58f [II, 381]; italics added.

⁵ Hartmann, *Ethik*, ch. 56d [II, 339–40].

⁶ Hartmann, *Ethik*, ch. 56c [II, 337].

⁷ Hartmann, *Ethik*, ch. 45c [II, 242–3].

a different way. Scheler laments that hatred of the world is more prominent than love of it in Western civilization. Christianity considers this world as “the valley of tears” and “life of sorrow,” simply preparation for the true life after death. Present-day modern technical civilization intensifies the contempt for the world by treating it as material for the satisfaction of human needs. Bereaved of any spirit and immanent form, the world must be transformed in terms of practical human purposes. Opposed to this contempt, Scheler points to two dominant forms of love of the world:

One that *flows from a divine person* by way of a detour, as it were, through the origin of the world. It flows in and with the divine person. For the other kind of love of world the world is an *immediate* object of contemplation in frenzy, and of an ecstatic enthusiasm to the degree that every thing, and every form of existence, drowns, during such ecstatic states, in the tides of being and life. In earlier times it was Bruno and Spinoza, and recently it was Walt Whitman and Verhaeren who formulated and thought this second kind of love of the world.⁸

Scheler prefers the first form of love of the world, especially in the way Francis of Assisi defines it: “Only when the love of the world is seen through God and His image of the world, through God’s ideas and values, can there be a motivation to raise and idealize the world in the direction of divine ideas and values as this happens in both culture and civilization proper.”⁹

Hartmann disagrees with this view because of its unjustifiable theological presuppositions. Yet his rejection does not impel him toward the other kind of love of the world, which Scheler describes in terms of a continuous frenzy. It is “calmness and clearness of vision,” not any form of frenzy, which Hartmann associates with the love of the world. If there are historical predecessors for his conception, they would be Lao-tse and Chuang-tse, but unfortunately Hartmann does not mention them.

Hartmann is concerned that Scheler conditions our love of the world on God’s love and the need to escape from the world in order to appreciate it. While describing the process of becoming human, Scheler writes:

At the moment when the actual spiritual being and its ideal contents constituted themselves through the act of saying “No” to the concrete reality in the environment, when an attitude of world-openness originated and a never-ceasing urge to penetrate without limits into the

⁸ Scheler, *Person and Self-Value*, 188–9.

⁹ Scheler, *Person and Self-Value*, 189.

revealed sphere of the world and to stop at nothing in the world of facts, when man, becoming himself, broke with the methods of all preceding life to adjust or to be adjusted to the environment and embarked upon the opposite direction of adapting the revealed world to himself and his own life of organic stability, when man separated himself from nature and transformed it into an object subject to domination and to the control of symbolic manipulation—at this moment man was also driven to anchor his own central being in something beyond the world. He who had placed himself so boldly above this world could no longer regard himself merely as a “member” or “part” of this world.¹⁰

What makes Hartmann uncomfortable about Scheler’s notion is man’s fulfillment of his own personality through his escape from the world and flight toward God. Neither the reality of the world nor the vocation of man is taken seriously by the escape. This misstep, of trying to figure out our position outside of cosmos in order to establish our position within it, is the source of Scheler’s mistakes. Again he regards the person as the subject only and thinks of God as a person. Hartmann says, “The world is not a correlate of anything,” and he may as well add: “Nor is the man.”¹¹ Scheler’s “personalism” becomes yet another “—ism,” in a bad sense of that word.

Hartmann is no less critical of the existentialist way of pursuing authenticity. Our everyday life does indeed obstruct our genuine potentials by forcing us to play the roles that are expected of us by our surroundings. But is it really the case that our experience of anxiety lifts us up to the level of genuineness? Does the meaning of the human being manifest itself in the experience of fear and its relationship to death? In Hartmann’s opinion, fear and anxiety are the worst possible guides toward authenticity. He who is filled with such fear and anxiety is incapable of a realistic view of life; he is incapable of adapting to the world as it is.¹²

Instead of extremism, Hartmann recommends modesty; instead of anxiety and fear of death, trust and love of the world. Returning once more to Socrates, who serves as an exemplar of an authentic personality

¹⁰ Scheler, *Man’s Place in Nature*, 90.

¹¹ Hartmann, *Ethik*, ch. 24e [I, 329]. See also ch. 85 [III, 260–74, especially 263].

¹² Hartmann, *Zur Grundlegung der Ontologie*, ch. 30d, 182. In his review of the 1100-pages long book, *Von Der Wahrheit*, by Karl Jaspers, Hartmann makes an important remark: “In addition to these [issues dealing with the nature of truth] he [Jaspers] considers love. When the short but detailed discussion of love here is compared with Heidegger’s analysis of anxiety, it is a great relief to find that the characteristic power of man does not rest only in unhappiness and despair, but that it acquires its real meaning in the positive form of elevated thought and self transcendence”; “German Philosophy in the Last Ten Years,” 426–7.

for Hartmann, he speaks of faith and trust as requiring moral courage and strength: "Blind faith, blind trust, is the supreme endurance-test of moral strength, the true criterion of genuineness in all the deeper dispositional relations of man with man." The ability to entrust one's own interest to another person is a precious gift, and "this gift is comparable to that of love and, as a value, can even transcend it."¹³

Hartmann recommends the attitudes of faith and trust as the foundation not only of our moral life, but also of our broader search for the meaning of life. Faith and trust give us a feeling of a solid earth under our feet, on which we can build a sense of solidarity and optimism and confront the complexity of life. What we need is a return to the world, not an escape from reality or a despair of the finitude. Our problem is not our finitude but our blindness for values; not the forgetfulness of an abstract being but the forgetfulness of the concrete, real world, of its individuality, transiency, and imperfection.

When Hartmann speaks of personal love, he emphasizes that it can be rightly directed at a morally imperfect person. It can be done without ignorance of all the factual imperfections, when our gaze is directed at his ideal self. He refers to this as an "ethical divination," because genuine love foresees and divines the possibility of an actualization of the ideal self in the real world. Through this anticipation and active encouragement, personal love helps the beloved person grow and strive toward his ideal selfhood.

Hartmann envisages a possibility of something analogous to our relationship to the real world. He memorably writes,

In life there is always something to which a man can look up. The upward gaze is not a result, but a cause. It does not arise out of comparison, but itself selects the points of comparison. In the ethos of the upward gaze all reverence and awe have their basis, as everyone who is morally unspoiled proves by his reverence and awe for real worth and merit, for antiquity or for persons in positions of higher responsibility.¹⁴

Hartmann's discussion has nothing to do with intellectualism and moralism. And although he does not explicitly talk about love of the world either, this detour should enable us to capture the idea in terms of his own philosophy. He understands love in a generic way, in the spirit of Kant's conception of good will, which consists in an uncalculated benevolence directed toward the well-being of others. Hartmann applies this concept

¹³ Quoted from Hartmann, *Ethik*, ch. 52b [II, 293] and ch. 52a [II, 292].

¹⁴ Hartmann, *Ethik*, ch. 53a [II, 299].

more consistently than Kant. He maintains the values of intention as defining of moral values and never switches from good will to the concept of duty (as Kant does). It is especially easy to relate Hartmann's conception of brotherly love and the love of the remote with good will. Personal love and radiant virtue, which Kant does not address in his ethics, pose a greater challenge.

According to Dietrich von Hilderbrand, we can divide various human motivations into *intentio benevolentiae* and *intentio unionis*: the benevolent intentions and the intentions striving toward unity. These intentions do not exclude each other, but they are separable. In some forms of love: self-love, brotherly love, love among friends, love of strangers, and love between parent and child, the *intentio benevolentiae* is centrally significant. (Such benevolence may be directed toward the self-perfecting, or toward the service of others, but, although moving in the opposite directions, these two can be complementary.) For some other forms of love—personal love, love of the world, and love of God—the *intentio unionis* appears to be of more direct importance.

Hartmann is not primarily interested in the *intentio unionis*, just as he is not engaged with the *intentio obliqua*. In his aesthetics, even more than in his ethical writings, he emphasizes our striving toward the highest and the greatest as the primordial urge of human beings. This resonates closely to his descriptions of personal love and the combination of radiant virtue and wisdom, which I treat here as Hartmann's version of the love of the world. In his *Aesthetics*, Hartmann uses an expression that points us in a new direction: "morally sublime."¹⁵

In its original meaning, the word "sublime" refers to something great or superior. When we experience something as sublime, we feel overwhelmed by the greatness or superiority of what we observe. The purest forms of the sublime can be recognized not only in the realms of religion and myth, but also in the realms of nature and art. We do not have a specific biological sense organ by means of which we can perceive the sublime. We even need to establish a certain distance from the sensually given to experience something as sublime. Moreover, we need to create a distance from our ego: the less this experience is about myself, the more easily I can experience the sublime. The sublime is something grasped by the entire soul.

In the case of moral sublimity, we encounter something that transcends the categories of moral goodness and strives toward the highest and greatest. Both personal love and love of the world fall into these

¹⁵ See, for example, *Ästhetik*, ch. 30ab, 363–8.

categories. Personal love unites the innermost depth of one human being with the innermost depth of another. It is a complete giving of oneself to a relationship with another person: one soul surrenders to another and unites with it. Personal love is an uncalculated giving of oneself without losing oneself in this relationship.

Love of the world means a refusal to control, manipulate, or exploit. It is a refusal to focus only on usefulness and the values of practical significance and is based on wonder and trust. It means the affirmation of all reality, a surrender that leads to a sense of unity with the world as a whole, to peace of mind and serenity.

We all crave the experience of personal love, of loving and being loved in that way, but such experience is not always possible. Its presence (or absence) does not depend on our wishes, attitudes, or feelings alone. Love of the world, by contrast, seems closer to something that is in our power, to something that the personality is capable of nourishing. Understood in this sense, serenity within and peace with the rest of the world may be the ultimate form of love and the final wisdom of life. They may be the highest accomplishments that human beings are capable of, the most profound fulfillment of the value of personality.

Hartmann writes, "The whole art of loving consists in retaining this high point of vision as a perspective and remaining under its spell. A life of love is a life spent in the knowledge of what is best worth knowing, a life of participation in the highest that is in man."¹⁶

Now we understand how our lives, and real being in general, can be coordinated in the light of the ideal.

¹⁶ Hartmann, *Ethik*, ch. 58f [II, 381].

Conclusion: Hartmann's New Ways of Philosophy

One clear evening, when Hartmann was a boy, his father took him outside. They must have stayed outdoors for a quite a while, looking at the starry sky. His father wanted to show the boy how, when observed in contrast to the local church tower, the position of the stars in the sky would change with the passing of time.¹ This may well have been Hartmann's introduction into philosophy, and he never forgot the lesson. Whether he was later thinking about the starry heavens of values, or the oceanic depths of being, Hartmann never failed to relate it to something right here and right now, tangible and measurable by the standards of our ordinary life. He did not allow himself to be carried away on the wings of speculations; he never overlooked what is right in front of him. Both the far away and the nearest must always be kept in sight, and the resistance of what is given and near must be taken as the ultimate check on our thoughts and theories. If something (like our ideas of the divine being, or of what happens after we die) could not be brought up in an interactive connection with the aspects of the phenomenally given world, Hartmann "bracketed" it out of his philosophical analysis. Philosophy for him was not primarily a method of thinking but a way of relating to the world.

Hartmann's most visible philosophical strength is his sharp eye for details. These details, however, are hardly ever the ultimate points that cannot be further resolved. Nor are they isolated from the network of related elements, within which they are structured. Whatever event or problem Hartmann happened to be exploring, he would carry out his exploration in connection with other related phenomena. There is no atomism of any kind in his philosophy, nor is there any form of reductivism that would be philosophically acceptable for him.

This way of philosophical analysis differs significantly from how "analysis" is usually understood in Western philosophy. The appeal of the analytical method has always been the presumption that it will lead us to the ultimate elements, to some Archimedean point that will articulate for

¹ This story is told by Frida Hartmann in her account of Hartmann's youth. See *Nicolai Hartmann und Heinz Heimsoeth im Briefwechsel*, ed. Frida Hartmann and Renate Heimsoeth (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag Herbert Grundmann, 1978), 317–21. Hartmann was eight years old when his father died.

us an overall view of the world. Whether this point is sought in the world, or outside of it, whether it is expected to be found in simple truths, or clear and distinct ideas, or the ultimate constituents of reality, or the eschatological completion of the world's development, "our quest for certainty" has relied on analysis to take us to the ultimate and the unconditioned.

To better understand why Hartmann rejected such philosophical analysis, let us remind ourselves of the fundamental presuppositions of Western philosophy and sum up where he stood in regard to them. These four pillars are:

1. *The principle of order*, which asserts that everything that exists is ordered and structured.
2. *The principle of knowability*, which maintains that everything that has structure and order is knowable.
3. *The principle of self-mastery*, which claims that ethical development and virtuous behavior require self-restraint and self-control.
4. *The principle of reciprocity* between virtuous behavior and happiness, which reassures us that those who master their own passions and behave virtuously will be rewarded, while those who do not will be punished.

Hartmann unquestionably embraces a version of the first principle: all being must be structured and ordered. A major part of Hartmann's philosophical endeavor is to uncover the basic ontological laws of that structure and order. Where he differs from most philosophers is in refusing to think about the world's structure in terms of "either-or," regardless of whether the relevant categories are determinacy or indeterminacy, matter or form, *Dasein* or *Sein*, finitude or infinity, or conflict and harmony. Our understanding of the structure of being requires systematic ontological thinking that must reconstruct the layers of the real world and explain their mutual relations. Hartmann attempts this in, perhaps, the most detailed categorial analysis ever undertaken in the history of philosophy.

Hartmann's project has not been completed; it nevertheless provides an important foundation for our other philosophical endeavors. Ontology may not be the most exciting philosophical discipline, but, in Hartmann's view, it is the most indispensable. In constructing a house for ourselves, we become preoccupied with the arrangement of the living space and not the foundation, which is underground and mostly invisible from above; ontology is likewise far from our daily concerns and immediate interest. And just as in our excitement to arrange the living space as quickly

as possible our house may be built without a proper foundation, so in philosophy we can develop theories without concern for what kind of base, with all of its possibilities and restraints, the real world provides. A house with an inadequate foundation will sooner or later collapse, as will similarly constructed philosophical theories. Without proper ontology and proper philosophical grounding, we enter the world easily swayed by delusion.

We see the relevance of a sound ontological foundation in the second pillar, which is perhaps the most unsustainable of the four. Hartmann rejects the epistemological optimism on which this pillar is based. Like a child who does not recognize its limitations or the complexities of the surrounding environment, epistemological optimism is driven by our quest to know the world by capturing it into a net of static, rationally arranged concepts. Yet the view of the overlap between the ideal, the rational, and the real, on which much of the epistemological optimism is “grounded,” is untenable. The categories of logic, which belong to ideal being, are not the categories of our actual thinking, much less are they the categories of real being. Just because our logical principles deny the validity of contradictory assertions about the states of affairs, these principles cannot make the “knots” of the world either disappear in thought, or dissolve in reality.

There is also no total overlap between the real and the rational, for there are aspects of real being that are not and cannot be known. There are even some aspects of ideal being that are not rationally known or rationally knowable. What is more, there are nonrational ways of knowing. Just as the ontological framework must include the ideal in addition to the real, so must the epistemological framework incorporate not only the rational but also the irrational. Among the irrational functions of the soul, we must account for the intuitive, perceptual, and emotional. Our encounters of the world begin with perception and intuition, and their base is emotional, not rational.

“Conflict as a way of being” is a fundamental ontological insight relevant not only for the “metaphysics of nature” but also for the “metaphysics of morals.” Hartmann must accept a version of the third pillar; after all, we cannot live without some form of discipline or self-mastery.

The purpose of self-mastery in the case of every individual is a transformative development through time. Our natural impulses and dispositions are not something to be blocked or tamed. The point is to ennoble them, to allow them to enrich themselves through a continuous interaction with our higher functions and gifts. This must be done in the light of both general human ideals and the ideals unique for every

individual. For Hartmann, the low is always strong, and its blocking or removal undermines the whole structure of reality. The high provides guidance but it is also weak and in need of a supporting foundation. Without grounding in something low and strong, the high is hollow and unstable, nothing but a game of words or a flight of imagination.

Hartmann has serious reservations about the forth pillar, which to him is as questionable as the second one. We simply cannot declare that virtue will lead to happiness; in too many known cases it does not. Nor can we properly salvage this principle by postulating that virtue makes us worthy of happiness, as Kant does, or by appealing to the system of rewards (and punishments) in another life. Life does not present us with such neatly finished formulas. What we witness time and again is struggle and conflict, a journey rather than a destination. Struggle and conflict keep us moving; they are behind our decisions, intentions, and actions. They keep our feeling of value alive and sharpen our discernment of them. Struggle and conflict open new vistas for us. Personality is a life-long series of attempts to come up with constructive solutions to these struggles and conflicts. It is a life lived at the crossroads of real and ideal being. To be a free and dignified human being is to be a journeyman.

Instead of the fourth pillar, Hartmann proposes the following approach. If there is any reward for struggles and striving toward self-mastery and virtue, it is the enjoyment of the journey, together with the discovery of the riches and wonders of life along the way. Happiness is not the highest value, nor is it something that can be pursued directly. It should not be our central concern; instead of happiness our concern should be the spiritual values that philosophy investigates and leads us to pursue. The ability to give and receive love (in all of its forms), to be truthful and trusting, to appreciate beauty and sublimity in nature and art, to pursue the richness of experience, these are the values that bestow meaning on our lives. In modern times, we have become unduly preoccupied with the values of the useful and the pleasant, just as we are bending over to prove that every one of our endeavors will lead to some practical results. Although such values are necessary for the sustenance of our existence, they leave us spiritually empty. They leave us without a sense of wonder for its many riches that have no utilitarian value or practical application. They leave us without the sense of belonging to the world.

Our obsession with practicality and efficiency narrows our value registers and makes us blind to a variety of spiritual values. If there is one question that bothers Hartmann most, one motive that drives his entire philosophical opus, it is the blindness of modern man. What Hartmann wants to understand is not only what leads to this blindness but, also,

what cure to offer for it. The one central thought that guides him in all his philosophical projects is the conviction that we need to rediscover the real world and relearn how to perceive, appreciate, and love it in its complexity. This is why Hartmann thinks of philosophy as an appreciative and reflective attitude toward the world's wonders, without the expectation of a definitive truth or a promised land of happiness for all. Philosophy cannot accomplish such miracles. Philosophy is just the analysis of wonder, come what may.

* * *

Jaspers divides philosophical thinkers into four groups. First, there are seminal thinkers (such as Plato, Augustine, and Kant) whose ideas are continuously fruitful. Second, there are the intellectual visionaries, who were either the original metaphysicians (such as Parmenides, Heraclitus, Spinoza), those "fired with the religion of the cosmos" (e.g. Empedocles, Anaxagoras, and Bruno), the gnostic dreamers (such as Origen, Böhme, and Schelling), or the constructors (such as Hobbes, Leibniz, and Fichte). Third, they can be great disturbers, among which Jaspers distinguishes the "probing negators" (including Abelard, Descartes, and Hume) from the "radical awakeners" (including Pascal, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche). Finally, there are "great systematizers and creative orderers," whose systems are the culmination of long developments (the greatest of which are Aristotle, Aquinas, and Hegel).

Where does Hartmann belong?

From one end of the spectrum, it would be presumptuous to put Hartmann in the same category with Plato, Augustine, and Kant. Despite his flashes of brilliance, despite the range of insights in several philosophical disciplines that are unquestionably novel and penetrating, we should be hesitant to include Hartmann among the greatest. If nothing else, his philosophy is for the most part forgotten and whether it may continue to bear fruits in the future, remains to be seen.

On the other end, there is plainly something of a great systematizer in Hartmann. Both his ontology and his axiology belong among the greatest systematizations in Western philosophy. But do they carry the ultimate significance of his work? Hartmann himself emphasizes that the time of great systems is over, indicating that he did not see his own project in the light of a system-builder.² Hartmann's approach to philosophy is systematic, without the desire to build a complete system.

² See Hartmann, *Zur Grundlegung der Ontologie*, Introduction, sec. 18, 28–31.

Looking at Jaspers's second and third groups of philosophers, Hartmann appears as both an intellectual visionary and a disturber. He offers an original metaphysical vision and attempts to act as an awakener. He warns us of the blindness of our age and tries to restore our sense of reality. His ontological pluralism and his axiology, which attempt to reawaken us for the richness and wonders of reality, convey a message as deep as it is urgent.

Despite its depth and urgency, Hartmann does not issue any apocalyptic warning. Nor is his philosophy based on any revolutionary novelty. With his characteristic modesty, he admits that the viewpoints he advocates have already been defended by other philosophers. In this sense, his philosophy is not new. And yet, as he himself remarks in a dialectical manner, "there is something new in the old whose being has not been exhausted by the fact that it was and is. Something can be missing although we have it. Man must learn to see it in a new way, so he can recognize it in the old."³

Jaspers's classification of philosophers is an example of the "either-or" reasoning: Hartmann must belong either to this category of philosophers, or to another one. As we have seen, however, it is impossible to squarely locate Hartmann into any of the provided boxes. His thinking is an illustration of his "both . . . and . . ." approach. Hartmann balances the appreciation for the concrete with the pursuit of the abstract; he succeeds in maintaining both wonder and analysis. Regardless of how we may want to classify Hartmann's philosophy, this is an achievement that can be ascribed to very few thinkers.

* * *

In our impatience to reach the true picture and reject all others as false, in our vehement quest for certainty based on one single principle, we have made two costly mistakes. One of them is to detach the human being from the world. The other is to internally divide the human being and open a chasm between his rational and irrational functions.

On many—too many—of our philosophy textbooks, there is an image of Auguste Rodin's "Thinker." This is an image of the man cramped in a thinking posture, oblivious to the rest of the world. Hartmann pities the philosophy represented by this statue. To him, it symbolizes everything that went wrong with philosophy.

An alternative image that represents Hartmann's vision of philosophy is the Renaissance popularization of the "Vitruvian man." This is not the image of a man lost in thought and lost for the world. Rather, this is the

³ Hartmann, *Grundzüge einer Metaphysik der Erkenntnis*, Preface for the first edition, iii.

image of a man standing with arms and legs outstretched, proportionately embedded in the world and reaching toward the entire universe. This man is eager to participate in the surrounding world and explore every one of its corners, every one of its wonders.

Does the Vitruvius man enjoy every aspect of his journey? Certainly not. Reality is not all good or all bad. Reality is not all love, nor all suffering, all knowledge, or all ignorance. Let us review two examples from Hartmann's life to illustrate just that. In the years preceding World War II, the madness of National Socialism was pulling many leading German intellectuals into its ranks. Even those who declined to join the Party, like Hartmann, were expected to begin their university classes with the then mandatory "Hail Hitler!" Hartmann's refusal made him one of the rare professors who dared to do it at Humboldt University in Berlin, and, indeed, in the whole of Germany. Despite enormous pressure, Hartmann stood his ground defending the ideals of human dignity and individual freedom.⁴

Another example worth mentioning occurred a few years later. In February 1945, the university building in which Hartmann used to lecture was destroyed in an aerial bombing and all his classes were suspended. He was then living in Berlin, which had been transformed into a real-life inferno. Without teaching obligations, Hartmann decided to write his aesthetics book, completing the first draft in the period from March to September 1945.⁵ Perhaps the most fascinating book of his entire opus, there is no despair in it over war and violence, maimed bodies, and destroyed buildings. As a boy he learned to measure the movement of the stars against the objects on earth, and now he measured the events of the day against the eternal beauty of Bach's music, the portraits of Rembrandt, the dramas of Shakespeare, and the novels of Dostoevsky. He delivers a remarkable message: wherever we are and whatever events pull us into their currents, we should not lose sight and cease to strive toward the highest and the most sublime.

In Hartmann's "attempt to coordinate the real in the light of the ideal" there is no appeal to a transcendent God. Nor is a utopia needed to turn the world upside down. We would search in vain through his books for any trace of the existential despair, or for a flight from reality into a seemingly value-neutral analysis of words and concepts. What we find instead is the abundance of love and reverence for life, in its various forms and

⁴ This story was reported to me by my teacher, Lewis White Beck, who in 1937–8 took a year-long seminar with Hartmann on Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*.

⁵ As testified by Frida Hartmann; see Hartmann, *Ästhetik*, 477 (Afterword).

manifestations. In Hartmann's writings there is that feeling of closeness to life and the participation in it, together with the observation of the tragic and the sublime wonders of the world, furthered by philosophical thoughts trying to penetrate as deeply as possible into the secrets of those wonders. Those thoughts, as systematic and as rigorous as they can be, do not lead to definitive findings, but to the discovery of ever-deeper antinomies and wonders of the world. And this, in turn, leads us to appreciate the world even more, and try to reflect on it more thoroughly than before. The wheel with the Vitruvius man turns on, without ever coming to a stop.

* * *

The working title of Arendt's *The Human Condition* was "*Amor Mundi*," for the love of the world. She wanted to oppose the *contemptus mundi*, contempt for the world and our alienation from it, so prevalent in the modern period of humanity. Arendt also intended to redirect the wondering impulse that the ancients knew as the origin of philosophical thinking. This impulse would be aimed directly at the realm of human affairs and the *vita activa*, rather than the ancient *vita contemplativa*. Thus, her focus was on action, rather than on labor (as in ancient Greek and Roman civilization), or on work and fabrication (as in modern European and American civilization).

It is possible that in the process of writing this book Arendt changed even more than its title. She considered the 1957 launching of "Sputnik," an epoch-making event, "second in importance to no other, not even to the splitting of the atom." Arendt not without irony saw this as the first step toward an "escape from man's imprisonment to the earth."⁶

Hartmann, who died seven years before the launch of "Sputnik," would be quite unequivocal on this issue. Far from being imprisoned by the earth, we are primarily prisoners of our blindness and delusions, of an insensitivity and inability to perceive and embrace what is before and within us. We have made ourselves strangers in this world by promulgating the myth, not only of the "Tree of Knowledge" (the second pillar), but also of the "Promised Land" (the fourth pillar). If this land exists, it is not in another life or in another galaxy. For Hartmann, the Promised Land is right here and now, it is in our world.

Hartmann's entire philosophy is an attempt to rediscover the real and develop an appreciation for it. The real has to be rediscovered and rescued from political and economic schemes of "practical" men that

⁶ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 1.

have crippled humanity. In times of crisis, when our world seems to be falling apart, we need philosophy not less but more. We need it as much as we need personal security, shelter above our heads, and food on our table. Perhaps, in these times, we need philosophy the most: What is the worth of mere existence, without trust and love, without the pursuit of the highest and the best?

Hartmann's philosophy matters because it teaches us to approach our imperfect world with perceptiveness, appreciation, and love. To do that, we do not need sophisticated intellectualistic and moralistic schemes. We should not attempt to escape from this world. Hartmann's philosophy teaches us that this world is the base on which we build our lives. We must always return to this world, to rediscover it anew, to wonder at it and reflect on it. The central idea of Hartmann's entire philosophical opus is the rediscovery of reality, with all of its conflicts, in all of its imperfect glory. This task is not accomplished by means of rationality and morality alone, but primarily by a loving attitude. Perhaps the most memorable sentence of Hartmann's entire opus is: "he who loves is the only one who sees; while he who is without love is blind."⁷

As a young man, with World War I ending and an uncertain career ahead, Hartmann confessed to his dearest friend that he was "always in love and perpetually perplexed."⁸ This uncertainty extended to his entire fate. Looking back at his overall life and work we are grateful that he stayed the course. Seen in the light of his philosophy, it would be much better if many more of us could find ourselves "always in love and perpetually perplexed."

⁷ Hartmann, *Ethik*, ch. 58f [II, 379].

⁸ See Hartmann's letter to Heinz Heimsoeth, of October 21, 1918; *Nicolai Hartmann und Heinz Heimsoeth im Briefwechsel*, 315.

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