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Levels of Reality in Nicolai Hartmann's Ontology

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Hartmann's New Ontology

"With the philosophy of Nicolai Hartmann we once again enter a world of sober, objective and impartial inquiry, which presses beyond man's self and seeks to grasp the universe of being so far as it is revealed to our limited capacity to know. The basic mood of Existence philosophy, as might be expected, is altogether missing from this universal way of viewing matters. (...).

The true concern of his philosophy is to discover the structural laws of the real world, of the world of being, not of some 'world of mere appearances' set out in front of the real world. Traditional philosophy, according to Hartmann, has sinned a great deal in this connection and in a double manner. First, it has always believed that it faced two basic alternatives - to accept an absolute knowledge of being, or else to assume the total unknowability of the 'things in themselves'. The latter course means rejecting the possibility altogether of objective knowledge of being, the former results in closed metaphysical systems that dismiss the irrational aspects of being and hold that the whole of being may in principle be grasped rationally. What has been overlooked is the middle possibility, namely, that being may be partially comprehensible conceptually despite the irrationality of the infinite portion that remains.

The second error of traditional philosophy is the propensity, stemming from the monistic need for unity, to transfer the categories or principles of one province to another that differs from it in kind. Illustrations are the application of mechanistic principles to the sphere of the organic, of organic relationships to social and political life, and, conversely, of mental and spiritual structures to the inanimate world. This infringement of categorial boundaries, as Hartmann calls the theoretical encroachment of one province of being upon another, must be eliminated by rigorous critical analysis; yet the categories must preserve their relative validity for the domain from which they were taken originally. From the standpoint of a critical ontology, the totality of beings then turns out to be a far more complicated structure than finds expression in the traditional metaphysical formulas of unity.

Knowledge belongs to the highest stratum with which we are acquainted, that of spirit or culture. Consequently only an ontology of spiritual being (*geistiges Sein*) can comprehend the essence of knowledge. At the same time, however, the problem of cognition must already have obtained at least a partial solution if ontological inquiry is to be admissible at all. For to begin with we do not even know whether there is any such thing as objective knowledge of being or a transcendent object independent of the subject of cognition. This fact necessarily places epistemology in a dual position. On the one hand, it must create the foundation for all ontological inquiry; but at the same time it can reach its goal only within the framework of an ontology of spiritual being. Hartmann attempts to do justice to this twofold aspect of knowledge by prefacing his works in ethics and ontology with an investigation of knowledge, by including in this investigation the ontological viewpoint, and by

discussing in his ontology the consequences of his findings for the phenomenon of cognition." (pp. 220-221)

From: Wolfgang Stegmüller, *Main Currents in Contemporary German, British, and American Philosophy*, Dordrecht; Reidel 1969.

"It is not easy to tell what exactly Hartmann understood by his 'ontology,' which he wanted to oppose to the old Pre-Kantian form of ontology. He certainly did not identify it with metaphysics. In this respect Hartmann's enterprise differed fundamentally from the many more or less fashionable attempts to resurrect metaphysics, attempts which have rarely led to more than tentative and precarious results. Superficially Hartmann's 'ontology' may seem to be nothing but what it meant to Aristotle: the science of being qua being in its most general characteristics. In order to determine its actual content, however, it will be best to look first at the type of topics and problems which Hartmann took up under the time-honored name. They comprise not only being qua being, i.e., the most general concept of what is (*das Seiende*), but existence (*Dasein*) and essence (*Sosein*), which he calls *Seinsmomente*, and the types of being designated by the adjectives 'real' and 'ideal,' named *Seinsweisen*, all of which are discussed in the first volume of the ontological tetralogy. The second volume deals with the modes of being (*Seinsmodi*) such as possibility and actuality, necessity and contingency, impossibility and unreality -- particularly impressive and perhaps the most original part of the set. The next major theme is the categories, first the general ones applying to all the strata (*Schichten*) of the real world and explored in the third volume (*Der Aufbau der realen Welt*), then the special categories pertaining only to limited areas, such as nature, which Hartmann takes up in the final work.

Finally, there are the categories peculiar to the realm of cultural entities (*geistiges Sein*) which he discussed in a work whose publication actually preceded the ontological tetralogy.

The mere mention of these topics will make it clear that such an ontology differs considerably from what had passed as ontology before Hartmann. It covers more and less. It adds the spheres of being which have been opened up by the sciences and the new cultural studies as well as by the theory of values. But it omits the traditional metaphysical problems, i.e., the ultimate questions dealing with God and immortality, which were the prize pieces of speculative metaphysics. The fact that Hartmann abandoned this earlier metaphysics did not mean that he denied its problems. Their insolubility even provides the very background for his new ontology. Hence we have no right to simply ignore them.

Ontology thus conceived constitutes really a segment of a metaphysics which is no longer simply a field for speculative treatment by a priori methods. To Hartmann metaphysical problems are those which form the horizon of scientific knowledge, and which are inescapable because of their connection with what we can know scientifically, yet which cannot be solved by the methods of science alone. Some of these problems he considered to be impenetrable and 'irrational' on principle, even though they too contain an ingredient (*Einschlag*) which can be explored by the rational methods of critical ontology. This 'least metaphysical part' of metaphysics is the proper field of the new ontology." (pp. 309-310)

From: Herbert Spiegelberg, *The Phenomenological Movement. A Historical Introduction*, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff 1963 (third edition).

The relevance of Hartmann's work for contemporary philosophy

The philosophical debate of the past decades has shown no interest in Hartmann's ideas and contribution to philosophy. Judging from current discussion, the only available conclusion that one can draw is that Hartmann left no legacy behind. Though this is a rather unwelcome conclusion, it seems difficult to deny its validity. How, then, could *Axiomathes'* readers possibly be interested in Hartmann's ideas? We are not archaeologists concerned with dead fragments of the past. We are scientists and philosophers closely involved in contemporary debate.

One of *Axiomathes'* fundamental beliefs is that real advances in science may sometimes depend on consideration of the origins and intellectual history of certain key ideas at the forefront of current

research. I believe that this applies to Hartmann. He developed ideas and tools that may stimulate a real advancement of contemporary science. I would therefore claim that one of the tasks of those few well acquainted with Hartmann's thought is to reorganize and represent his ideas so that they can be understood by most contemporary researchers.

Hartmann is only one of the many great figures of the past that have lapsed into oblivion, as witnessed by the well-known cases of Brentano, Peirce and Whitehead.

It is well known that the idea of ontology is grounded in the definition put forward by Aristotle at the beginning of the fourth book of *Metaphysics*: "there is a science which studies being qua being [...]". The problem is this: why does not Aristotle simply say that ontology is the theory of being? The main reason for distinguishing between theory of being and theory of being qua being rests on Aristotle's contention that the analysis of being *simpliciter* cannot be developed scientifically. Aristotle's intention to submit being to scientific analysis was therefore the principal reason why he adopted a reduplicative form of analysis. His position derived from the thesis that being is not a genus, whereas scientific analysis can only be developed if there is a common genus for the items under examination. If being does not have a common genus, the study of being cannot be a science. Aristotle stated very clearly that when one moves from the study of being to the study of being qua being, some of the ways in which one can talk about being are no longer valid. *Metaphysics* VI, 2 tells us that being *simpliciter* can be talked about in various ways. On passing from being to being qua being, only two of them remain valid: analysis according to the categories, and analysis according to potentiality and actuality (the latter can be rephrased as what is nowadays called dynamics).

The two main underpinnings of a properly understood Aristotelian ontology are therefore the idea that metaphysics comes after physics that is, the idea that ontology requires science -- and that the theory of being should be replaced by the theory of being qua being (that is, by a categorical framework plus a dynamics).

Hartmann followed the same line of thought: he explicitly claimed that ontology comes after science, that the proper ontological viewpoint is the categorical one and that reality is thoroughly dynamic. Considering that ontology has been a pejorative label for twentieth-century mainstream philosophy, this may help explain why it has been so difficult for Hartmann's achievements to gain recognition.

This issue of *Axiomathes* is based on the papers presented at the conference *The Legacy of Nicolai Hartmann*, organized by the recently established MITTELEUROPA FOUNDATION for the fiftieth anniversary of Hartmann's death (Bolzano, June 21-22, 2001).

From Roberto Poli, "Foreword" to *Axiomathes*, Vol. 12, 2001, Nos. 3-4, Special Issue: *The Legacy of Nicolai Hartmann (1882-1950)*.

Hartmann' auto-presentation

"The projects in ontology constitute a special chapter, although only one of these was actually brought to completion in our period. The famous work of Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, which had evoked great interest both in and out of Germany, was never finished. But its influence has been great even up to the present. (...) On the other hand, Nikolai Hartmann, after *Grundlegung der Ontologie* (1935) had opened up a new line of development, proceeded to publish two larger works -- *Möglichkeit and Wirklichkeit* (1938) and *Der Aufbau der realen Welt. Grundriss der allgemeinen Kategorienlehre* (1940). The third volume of this set, the *Spezielle Kategorienlehre* (philosophy of nature), could not be published. Nevertheless, the two published writings contain the gist of the scheme, which is further elaborated in a smaller writing, *Neue Wege der Ontologie* (in *Systematische Philosophie*, 1942. 2nd ed., 1947). The first of these books presents a new analysis of the modal categories. The main thesis is that the essence of reality, which is so difficult to conceive, if it is understood as the kind of being possessed by the world in which we live, can actually be so conceived in terms of the relation of the modes which govern it. The study shows that the traditional conception of these modes cannot account for the kind of being which reality possesses, and so the modes themselves must be interpreted in a completely new manner. The new interpretation consists of a thorough analysis of their mutual relations -- the " intermodal relations "; and the conclusions lead directly to new determinations of the nature of becoming, obligation, the puzzling character of

aesthetic objects, etc. Also a new formulation and justification of the principle of sufficient reason is developed. Consequences are also found for the problem of ideal being, the realm of logic and knowledge, the general conclusion being that these modes and their interrelations vary with each of these realms. The second work develops the new ontological conception of the categories, and applies it to the group of " basic categories " (*Fundamental kategorien*) -- that is, those categories which are common to all levels, spheres and realms of being, and which are articulated even in the highest levels of being. In this connexion we find a great many " categorial laws ", which underly the stratification of the real world and determine its inner structure. As a result we are led to the so called " laws of dependence ", and eventually to the controversial problem of moral freedom -- for which a new solution is proposed." (pp. 421-422)

From: Nicolai Hartmann, "German Philosophy in the Last Ten Years", translated by John Ladd, *Mind*, 58, 1949, pp. 413-433.

Metaphysics and Ontology

"In opposition to almost the whole of modern philosophy, Hartmann asserts the ontological nature of all fundamental problems which philosophy attempts to solve. Even idealism or the most extreme subjectivism have, somehow or other, to explain at least the "illusion" of being, no matter how they try to avoid it; there is no form of theoretical thought which can refuse to be basically ontological, that is, does not propose questions about "being as such." It is obviously the essence of thought that one cannot think "nothing," one must think "something," and that "something" immediately raises the problem of being. Furthermore, the natural sciences are in no position to cut themselves off from a metaphysical background. Metaphysics is born of wonder at the fact of life, which cannot be explained either mechanically or teleologically. Psychology, the philosophy of history, logic, aesthetics, and above all epistemology and ethics, are faced with the same problems.

The older metaphysics had made two mistakes. First, it undertook to solve the insoluble.

Metaphysics signifies the irrational, and the irrational is the unintelligible. But being has also an intelligible side. The persistence of numerous problems is proof of this, for example in the recurrent contradictions between freedom and determinism, immanence and transcendence, life and mechanism. We cannot hope for a solution of these problems, but with appropriate methods we can advance their elucidation and confine to smaller and smaller compass the unintelligible remainder.

Second, the older metaphysics made the mistake of erecting closed systems and of forcing reality into these molds. The time for such systems is past, says Hartmann. What has weight in the works of the great philosophers is not their systems but the problems which they work out. All systems celebrate triumphs in the empty breeze of speculation. A few principles are laid down and then one proceeds forward by deduction. But even if the unity of the world is to be considered as given we yet do not know what in fact is its ultimate principle. The method that is called for is precisely the opposite. The *philosophia prima* which is to be evolved can be a *philosophia ultima* for our cognitive capacities only because the *ratio cognoscendi* moves toward the *ratio essendi*.

In this critique of the older metaphysics we begin to see how Hartmann wishes the concepts, metaphysics and ontology, to be construed. In contrast to the classical usage of the term he does not regard metaphysics as a science but as a tissue of questions to which there are no answers. The intelligible aspect of being, on the other hand, falls into the domain of ontology.

Ontology in this sense is a science, but it is not identical with phenomenology which has great propaedeutic value but cannot constitute the whole of ontology. Phenomenology glides dangerously over the surface of problems, and on the basis of its very definition it does not reach beyond the external appearance of the real. It remains bound to mere matter of fact and cannot get beyond this. Hartmann's magnificent and original investigations into the nature of problems as such have shown that even when an intelligible object is under discussion one always discovers it to be a mixture of the known and the unknown. The fact that problems may be distinguished from each other proves that something is known of the matter in hand, just as the fact of inquiring into it shows that it is not known. To state problems is the chief task of philosophy." (pp. 213-216)

From: I. M. (Józef Maria) Bochenski, *Contemporary European Philosophy*, translated from the German by Donald Nicholl and Karl Aschenbrenner, Berkeley: University of California Press 1957.

(Original German published in 1947).

The dimensions and forms of being

"It is now clear that Hartmann's statement of fundamental problems and his theory of knowledge turn first of all on the issue of being qua being (*Seiendes als Seiendes*). His propositions about being and its properties may now be examined.

Here are encountered the comprehensive investigations of his main four-volume work of which only the most important ideas can be mentioned. The basic principle of Hartmann's doctrine of being is that being develops in two dimensions, namely (1) the four completely distinct spheres of being and (2) the levels of being (*Seinsstufen*) within these spheres.

In the spheres of being Hartmann distinguishes two primary ones, of real and of ideal being, which may also be designated as modes of being (*Seinsweisen*) and two secondary, the cognitive and the logical spheres. Real being must not be confused with actuality (*Wirklichkeit*) for there is both real possibility and ideal possibility, though this distinction is really part of modal analysis. As to the relation between the primary and secondary spheres, there is an intimate cross-relationship between the cognitive and the real modes of being, and between the logical and the ideal. Propositions about the latter are especially important, for Hartmann holds that ideal being is similar to real being in itself in that it can be known, and knowing is always by its very nature the grasp of what has being in itself. The most familiar types of ideal being are the realms of essences and values and of mathematical being. The first of these appears in reality as basic structure but without being exhausted in that context. There are entities in ideal being which do not become real, for example, spaces with more than three dimensions. On the other hand, there is real being which is not subject to the laws of ideal being; for example, the alogical, the value-negating, the real contradiction. All ideal being is general, and is either forms, conformity to law or relations. Compared with the real, the ideal is lesser being. We must reject Plato's view that it is something "higher, more sublime". Ideal being is not identical with the rational for in its domain there is also to be found the irrational, and this incidentally is a proof of its having independent being for the transintelligible is exempt from idealistic criticism.

Hartmann analyzes the other spheres in similar fashion. He then proceeds to specify the character of the second dimension of being, that of the strata or levels of being (*Seinsstufen*). In real being we find four levels, matter, life, consciousness, and spirit. Being known (*Erkenntnissein*), by a certain analogy to these, involves perception, intuition, knowledge, and comprehension (*Wahrnehmung, Anschauung, Erkenntnis, Wissen*). Logical being finally divides, as the tradition has it, into concept, judgment, and inference. These separate levels are determined through the categories, the principles of a given level. Hartmann distinguishes two kinds of categories: modal categories which are accorded a special investigation, and fundamental categories which can be arranged in opposing pairs. In contrast to Kant and Alexander, the latter are not arranged in a definite system but are only loosely strung together in a table of existential opposites (*Seinsgegensätze*). The twelve pairs involved here include form-matter, inner-outer, determination-dependence, quality-quantity. Hartmann has devoted extensive study to the question of the categories in his comprehensive work *Der Aufbau der realen Welt: Grundriss der allgemeinen Kategorienlehre*, the third volume of his *Ontologie*. After thorough survey of earlier views his theory culminates in the formulation of many categorial laws. Some of the most important are these: the law of strength (the lower is the stronger), and its counterpart, the law of freedom (the higher level is autonomous, for in respect to the lower level it is the richer). While therefore every higher level is borne by a lower one, still their relations are not always the same. The organic, the level of life, is only an over-forming (*Überformung*) of the spatio-physical aspect of matter, while the levels of consciousness and spirit rise in a more independent process of over-building (*Überbauung*) above life; that is, in this case not all the lower categories reappear.

The second great categorial group, the theory of the modalities of being (*Seinsmodi*) represents one of the most significant parts of Hartmann's metaphysics. What is notably original is that modal analysis leads to quite different results in the four spheres of being. Thus in each sphere there are

distinguishable modalities of being. Of these, however, the laws which hold of real being are the most important. The modalities divide into the absolute modalities (reality and unreality) and the relative (possibility, impossibility, necessity). There is also a negative counter-modality to necessity, namely contingency, of which the rule holds that absolute necessity is likewise absolute contingency. One should further emphasize Hartmann's theory of possibility according to which in real being only that is possible whose conditions are all real. Hence all that is possible is likewise real and necessary, and all that is negatively possible is likewise unreal and impossible. This does not mean of course that the modalities themselves are identical. Implication is not identity. The distinction between positive and negative possibility rests on the law of division of disjunctive possibility which is valid in real being though not in logical being.

In his ontology Hartmann has also addressed himself to the traditional distinction between essence and existence. These he calls "moments of being" (*Seinsmomente*): the "what" (*Sosein*) and the "that" (*Dasein*). It is noteworthy that these moments of being appear differently in both of the primary spheres of being. Thus the ideal "what" and "that" can be known a priori, but the real "that" only a posteriori. One cannot simply equate the "what" with the ideal and the "that" with real being. Actually there is no absolute difference between "what" and "that" in the existential relationships that obtain in the world for it is a question altogether of relative moments. The "that" of the leaf belongs to the "what" of the tree, and the "that" of the latter to the "what" of the forest. The distinction holds only for the whole of the universe and for particular beings." (pp. 217-221)

From: I. M. (Józef Maria) Bochenski, *Contemporary European Philosophy*, translated from the German by Donald Nicholl and Karl Aschenbrenner, Berkeley: University of California Press 1957. (Original German published in 1947).

Hartmann's phenomenological ontology

"How to get at the basis of Hartmann's ontology? Let us sketch the superstructure, and then descend into the depths of the foundation. Besides the two primary spheres, there are two secondary spheres of being -- the spheres of 'logic' and 'knowledge'. These are mid-way spheres inasmuch as they share the categories of both the primary spheres. (Compare Whitehead's 'hybrid' entities.)

Following the Aristotelian tradition, Hartmann takes ontology as the science of beings as beings. Ontology is concerned with what first makes beings beings. The word "Sein" gives rise to the illusion, as if there is some entity or attribute corresponding to it, something over and above, may be, underlying or pervading the various beings. Hartmann rejects this thought. A science of beings as beings is not a science of any such entity or attribute as *Sein*. On the other hand, it can only be a science which lays bare the various spheres of being along with their general and special categories and inter-categorical (hence, inter-sphere) relations. Hence, ontology becomes a doctrine of categories, a "Kategorienlehre". To keep these primary and secondary spheres along with their general and special categories before the mind, in their distinctions as well as in their interrelations, is essential for an understanding of Hartmann's ontology. Hartmann displays great acumen in drawing these distinctions and in keeping clearly apart what he considers to be distinct. Through these distinctions, he claims to have the clue in hand for avoiding many of the errors of the traditional ontologies.

There are two primary spheres of being: the real and the ideal. The real consists of the chain of temporal events. The structure of the real sphere is a stratification of various levels: the material, vital, psychical and spiritual. The stratification consists in the relation of "founding". The higher level is "founded" on the lower. The lower provides the basis for the higher. The real sphere has its general categories, those which determine the entire sphere, irrespective of the differences of strata. Such categories are, for example, the modal categories. But each stratum of reality has also its own special categories. The relation in which two levels of reality stand to each other is concretely illustrated in the relation in which the categories of the The key to this entire discussion lies in the formulation of the nature of the ideal sphere. In setting aside what he calls the errors of tradition, Hartmann shows here his capacity at its best." (pp. 116-117)

From: Jitendra Nath Mohanty, *Phenomenology and Ontology*, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff 1970, Chapter XI. *A Recent Criticism of the Foundations of Nicolai Hartmann's Ontology*, pp. 115-128.

"... Hartmann regards ontology to be concerned with: (1) the two aspects ("moments") of being: *Dasein* and *Sosein*, or *that* and *what*; (2) the two spheres of being: real and ideal; and (3) the modalities of being: *actuality*, *possibility*, and *necessity*.

One of the errors of phenomenology -- including both Husserl's and Scheler's -- is that when it regards itself as investigation into essences, as distinguished from existence (as a consequence of eidetic reduction), it forgets that essences also have their *Dasein* (existence) and their *Sosein*, that *Dasein* is not as such real existence. There is also, as with essences and mathematical idealities such as numbers, and values, ideal *Dasein*. Husserl does sometimes insist that essences are a kind of objects *sui generis*, so it may be just right to interpret eidetic reduction not as abstracting from existence, but as abstracting from real existence. But, then there is the curious consequence that essences have both real and ideal existence (when they are taken in their purity). Hartmann seems to have wavered on this question. In his early work *Grundzüge einer Metaphysik der Erkenntnis*, he denied existence and individuality to ideal entities, but still ascribed to them *Ansichsein*, intrinsic being. In *Die Grundlegung der Ontologie*, he ascribed existence to them, but that only means he was taking "existence" and "*Ansichsein*" as being the same.

So, for Hartmann, the *Dasein-Sosein* distinction is not quite the same as real-ideal distinction. In addition, Hartmann insisted that some *Soseins* are "neutral" as against both real and ideal existence: "roundness" belongs to a real spherical ball as well as a geometrical circle.

If concerns (1) and (2) do not coincide, it is also a mistake to collapse (2) with (3). The latter mistake is committed by those who hold that reality is the domain of all that is actual, while essences are pure possibilities. A corollary of this view is that truths about reality (i.e., about what is actual) are contingent, whereas truths about essences (i.e., about pure possibilities) are necessary. This is a widely held view, and one of Hartmann's important theses is that this view is based on an inadequate analysis of modal concepts.

Hence the importance of modal concepts in Hartmann's thinking. It is only the modal concepts as pertaining to a sphere of being, which explicate the precise mode of being of that sphere. In other words, Hartmann held that while in an important sense we cannot say much about what "real existence" (or "ideal existence") consists in, the best we can do in this regard is to look at how the concepts of "possibility" "actuality," and "necessity" (and their opposites) behave with regard to the domain of reality (or, with regard to the domain of ideality). So we shall turn to his modal theory, but before I do that, perhaps a quick sketch of what he counts as belonging to the two domains would be in order.

The real world is a stratified structure, on Hartmann's view, with nonliving matter at the base, living organisms founded on it, mental reality founded on organic life, and spirit or *Geist* (including society and all social formations) at the apex. Each of these strata has its own categorial structure, and the entire domain of reality also has certain common structures.

The domain of idealities consists of: mathematical entities (such as numbers), essences, and values. None of the idealities is spatiotemporally individuated. An ideality maybe instantiated or be an ingredient in many real individuals, without surrendering its own identity.

Besides these two primary spheres of being, Hartmann also recognized two intermediate (or hybrid) spheres: those of logic and cognition. With this brief sketch, let us look at his modal theory worked out in *Möglichkeit und Wirklichkeit*." (pp. 26-27)

From: Jitendra Nath Mohanty, *Phenomenology. Between Essentialism and Transcendental Philosophy*, Chapter 3: *Nicolai Hartmann's Phenomenological Ontology*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press 1997.

Hartmann's theory of modality

"In his *Möglichkeit und Wirklichkeit* (Berlin 1937, 2nd. ed. 1949), Hartmann gives us an ontological theory of the modes. He starts from a distinction between the modes of the various spheres of being, primary and secondary. The two primary spheres of being, according to his ontology, are the real and the ideal. The two secondary spheres are those of logic and knowledge. The modes of the real world are accordingly contrasted with those of the ideal realm; the modes of the realm of logic are again different from those of knowledge. The modal doctrine is thereby divided into four parts. But there must be also a part on the relations between these different spheres.

Traditional discussion of the problem of modality did not see clearly through these distinctions. This gives to Hartmann's treatment of the problem its originality. Further, these modes of the various spheres are distinguished from the naive day to day consciousness of modality.

The ontological point of view requires specification. For this purpose, we are to distinguish between three different approaches to the problem of modality:

First, it is possible to consider the modalities as criteria for classifying all objects in the three groups, those that are merely possible, those that are both possible and actual, and those that are possible, actual and also necessary.

Secondly, it is possible to consider the modes as if they were different stages of a process. Thus, it may be said that a thing first becomes possible, then is made actual, and further may or may not be necessary. The process however may not be carried to the end; what is possible may never be actualised.

Thirdly, the modes may be taken neither as criteria nor as stages of a process, but as the constituent aspects of the existent or the subsistent, as the case may be. This is the point of view which we may call the critical point of view, because we may trace it to Kant. Kant starts from the given object of experience and then asks how the same is possible, actual and necessary.

Hartmann rejects the first two approaches. Modes are for him neither criteria nor stages, but the most primary characteristics of the being of anything. As such, given an object of experience, we can ask: what makes it possible? What makes it actual? What makes it necessary?

Thus in an important sense, Hartmann's treatment of the problem is similar to Kant's, even though Kant's own solutions are rejected by Hartmann. For Kant, the given is possible when considered in relation to its form and actual when considered in relation to its matter. Hartmann finds this not only inadequate but also misleading; to this however we shall turn later on.

The second approach is attributed to Aristotle. Both the first and the second approaches attribute to the merely possible which is not 'or has not yet become actual' a sort of ghostly existence -- a position in between being and non-being. Aristotle's doctrine of *dynamis* and *energia* is further criticised as an illegitimate extension of the categories of the sphere of organic being to the entire domain of being. Further, if a prior stage of mere possibility is admitted, the question arises as to what must be added to it in order to render it actual. Kant had shown that any answer to this question is absurd. For, that which must be so added, argued Kant, must be other than the possible, that is to say, must be impossible! (1)

As such, we come back to the *critical* formulation of the question. This is one of the points where we begin to see the influence of Kant on Hartmann's ontology which claims the name of critical ontology." (pp. 181-182)

Notes

(1) I. Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, WW III p. 206, hg. v. Ernst Cassirer.

From: Jitendra Nath Mohanty, "Remarks on Nicolai Hartmann's Modal Doctrine", *Kant-Studien*, 54, 1963, pp. 181-187.

On the extant as extant in general

"The first one of the four treatises included in the *Grundlegung [der Ontologie]* is entitled "*Vom Seienden als Seienden überhaupt*" (On the Extant as Extant at all). It comprises three sections, consisting of ten chapters. The following is a summary of its contents.

Section I. The Concept of the Extant and its Aporia. Chapter 1. The Fundamental Question of Ontology.

A departure can be made from this side of realism and idealism. It only seems to be different because of the habit of understanding Being (Sein) as Being per se (*Ansichsein*). But the phenomenon must be viewed first without interpretation. One must not form any arbitrarily speculative prejudgment. He who tries to do so, is not yet on realistic grounds.

A careful distinction must be made between Being (*Sein*) and the Extant, that-which-is (*Seiendes*). The interrelationship of the two is the same as that of Truth and the True, of Reality and the Real, of Factuality and the Factual -- of *esse* and *ens*. Unfortunately, these pairs of concepts have always been confused with each other. Being (*Sein*) is the *One* the identical in the manifoldness of the Extant. Naturally, the two must not be separated from each other, but the lack of distinction has led to viewing Being as a substance.

The Aristotelian version of the question is helpful today still. Its chosen task is to explain Being as Extant, or the Extant as such. This clearly points up Being as such as something general, although the wording uses the term "Extant." Aristotle, too, failed to overcome the peril of substantialism, but the latter can be avoided by adhering faithfully to his wording. It is a wonderful formula. Just how wonderful it is can best be recognized by seeing how much it wards off. If Being is regarded as appearance or as something in the state of becoming, the formula is violated. Such a cognition does not involve a cognition of the Extant as Extant. Likewise in the case of the Extant as something posited, meant, imagined and subject-referred. For Being is not absorbed in the objecthood (*Gegenstandsein*). This is the supreme meaning of the Aristotelian formula which hits well the formal meaning of the fundamental question. Heidegger tried in vain to defend himself against it.

Chapter 2.

It is worth our while to take a closer look at Heidegger's abortive attempt. He abandoned Aristotle's formula for the other one which queries for the sense and meaning of Being.

Heidegger's concept of here-ness (*Dasein*) remains completely man-bound. Here-ness (*Dasein*) is Being (*Sein*) that understands its own Being (*). This is why the Extant (*Seiendes*), the world, Truth, are the ever-mine. This prejudices everything, and such an analysis of Being ends up as the analysis of givenness. The modes of givenness are the modalities of Being. The objective spirit is de-powered, the stratum of Being (*Seinsschicht*) of the historical spirit become impalpable. The personal decision of the individual alone is proven right.

It is wrong to twist the question of Being into a question of meaning. It is as proper to inquire about the Being of meaning as about the Meaning of Being. Yet, this is not the general question of Being. Meaning exists always only for somebody. There is no meaning in-itself. The Being of the Extant stands indifferent to whatever the Extant might be "for somebody."

Chapter 3. The Attitude of Ontological Cognition.

Being (*Sein*) is the ultimate and therefore cannot be defined. It is impalpable, the out-and-out universal. It cannot even be delimited against something else, such as some other universal.

Only the contentual element of a mode of Being can be indicated, not the mode of Being itself. But this irrationality is merely partial. Therefore, it cannot be defined and cannot be typed by characteristics, but the way from the general to the special is open, and this circumstance makes it necessary to bring in certain specific questions. This is the path which we take in this treatise. There is a circumstance which proves useful in this reflection on the aporia of generality and indeterminacy of the Extant as Extant, of the Extant as such, of Being at all -- ontology is a re-approach to the natural. This makes one ponder the difference between natural and reflected attitude. Cognition is directed at its object, at that which it perceives, and not at that which constitutes the cognition. If we want to reach some conclusion on it, we must go into the attitude called reflection, which is a bending-back (re-flexion), whereas cognition stands for the natural. This bending-back becomes a source of aporias in epistemology. The same thing occurs in psychology. Acts are not given, like objects. The hardest task in this respect is that of logic, if it wants to make its object not the contentual element of the concepts, but the concepts themselves. This is why it has so often slipped from its own plane onto those of psychology, epistemology or ontology. We have thus found three fields in which the natural attitude must be replaced by a reflected one, involving diverse complications.

Borrowing certain concepts from scholasticism, from Wilhelm von Occam in particular, let us call the natural attitude *intentio recta*, and the reflected bending-back *intentio obliqua*. Then we can say that ontology is the restoration of the *intentio recta*.

Chapter 4. Position and Roots of the Problem of Being.

Three principal fields are present in the *intentio recta*: the natural, the scientific, and the ontological relationships to the world. Moreover, however, we classify epistemology,

psychology and logic under the heading "Philosophy," not under "Science." Ontology continues the natural trend which starts in the pre-scientific, and which is taken over by natural science and also by the science of the mind. The recognition of the right, for instance, represents an unreflected mental attitude, and the same holds true for the other fields of objective spirit, in strong contradistinction to epistemology, psychology and logic. Ontology is, therefore, in this respect, a continuation. In the case of the *intentio recta* of natural science, the external material form of the givenness (*Gegebenheit*) is still predominant. Thus, all these fields, in contradistinction to the other three, show a common relationship to the Extant, the essential trend of a natural realism which knows that taking something for an object is not the same as taking something for an Extant.

As contrasted with the naive world-awareness, however, enormous contentual differences are involved here, but the unity of the object range remains intact in the four fields. The object is the same, but the view of the object changes. Something of the prescientific naive view is preserved in the theory. The word theory means view.

The *intentio obliqua* misses the given aspect of the Extant. Reflection gets always only as far as the objects and does not reach the Extant. It is therefore all too likely to wander into the blind alley of the immanence of the awareness.) .Thus, gnosiology wants to hold fast in the reflectedness of the awareness of it. Without gaining a firm footing ontologically, gnosiology here misses its own object - cognition.

Phenomenology does not get as far as the things (as it so strongly emphasizes), but merely as far as the phenomenon of the thing. It becomes tuned to things through *intentio recta* -- to the phenomena by *intentio obliqua*. That which is given is grasped mentally in the reflected attitude. This casts a light on what the phenomenological methods call "bracketing" (*Einklammerung*), "reduction" (*Reduktion*), and raising before the bracket" (*Vor-die-Klammer-Heben*)." (pp. 15-19)

Notes

(*) It is Being concerned by its own Being, and which thus is Being-in-the-World.

From: Otto Samuel, *A Foundation of Ontology. A Critical Analysis of Nicolai Hartmann*, New York: Philosophical Library 1953.

Levels of reality and levels of being

"In his architectural ontology, Hartmann distinguishes between levels of reality and levels of being. (1)

As to levels of reality, he distinguishes at least four ontological strata of the real world: the material, the psychological and the social, among which specific forms of categorical and existential dependence exist. Reality, however, is only a section of being.

As to the levels of being, Hartmann distinguishes among ontology, ontics and metaphysics. In particular:

1. Ontology concerns the categorical analysis of entities by means of the knowledge categories able to classify them.
2. Ontics refers to a pre-categorical and pre-objectual connection which is best expressed in the relation to transcendent acts.
3. Metaphysics is that part of ontics or that part of ontology which concerns the residue of being that cannot be rationalized further according to categories.

On the basis of this last distinction, the psychological stratum is of crucial importance in Hartmann's ontology, and for various reasons.

Firstly, because it provides direct access to the ontic. This access is problematic, however, because certain layers of the psychological stratum, due to the lack of adequate knowledge categories, at first sight seem to be excluded from ontological categorization.

Secondly, because the psychological stratum is one of the levels of beginning of new series of categories. It is well known that in Hartmann's ontology the psychic level stands in a twofold relation, as follows:

1. The relation of overforming (*Überformung*), which holds among ontological layers. According to this relation every category can constitute the matter of a higher category.

2. The relation of building above (*Überbauen*), which holds among ontological strata. According to this relation the higher stratum requires the lower one only as its external basis of existential support, but not as matter to be overformed.

Consequently, the psychological level assumes a fundamental role also as regards the problem of the categorical ontological dependences.

Hartmann describes the complexity of the psychological levels in *Zur Grundlegung der Ontologie*, affirming that psychology could deem itself extraneous to the problem of metaphysics as long as reality was considered to be a characteristic of the external world (things, physical being). But the psychic world is as real as the physical world. Psychology must understand of what psychic reality consists from an ontological point of view and then shed light on a complex series of states and acts that are not immediately experienced and are unconscious. Given in immediate experience are not elements but wholes, organized connections, which relate to whatever is not experienced immediately.

How can one explain be shed on the genesis of psychological wholes and organized connections whose components seem inextricable and therefore destined to constitute the nucleus of the non-rationalizable residue of metaphysics?" (pp. 299-300)

Notes

(1) Following Poli we use (i) *level* as a general term, (ii) *stratum* to refer to the realms of being characterized by categorical diverse groups, and (iii) *layer* to refer to the segmentation internal to each stratum. See Roberto Poli, *Alwis: Ontology for Knowledge Engineers*, Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Utrecht 2001, ch. 8, 124-126.

From: Liliana Albertazzi, "The Roots of Ontics," *Axiomathes* 12, 2001, pp. 299-315.

Hartmanns' concept of categories

"All ontology has to do with fundamental assertions about being as such. Assertions of this sort are precisely what we call categories of being. Like the Kantian categories -- which, as far as content is concerned, are also precisely this: fundamental assertions about being -- they have the character of universal constitutive principles comprising all more specialized ontological assertions. Hence, the new ontology might be expected to provide a transcendental deduction also of these ontological assertions. Otherwise, it is argued, it could not guarantee their objective validity. That, however, would mean that this ontology in its turn was in need of an epistemological foundation which would have to provide the justification of a priori principles of an even wider scope.

Thereby a way for ontology is traced, and this way once more follows the scheme of the old deductivity. But it is here that the roads of the old and the new ontology part. Just as in regard to the problem of being it is today no longer a question of substantial forms and of the teleological determination of actual processes by these forms, so also the problem at issue is no longer that of a *post factum* justification of a priori principles. The categories with which the new ontology deals are won neither by a definition of the universal nor through derivation from a formal table of judgments. They are rather gleaned step by step from an observation of existing realities. And since, of course, this method of their discovery does not allow for an absolute criterion of truth, here no more than in any other field of knowledge, it must be added that the procedure of finding and rechecking is a laborious and cumbersome one. Under the limited conditions of human research it requires manifold detours, demands constant corrections, and, like all genuine scholarly work, never comes to an end.

Here one may truly and literally speak of new ways of ontology. The basic thesis can possibly be formulated like this: The categories of being are not a priori principles. Only such things as insights, cognitions, and judgments can be a priori. In fact the whole contrast between a priori and a posteriori is only an epistemological one. But ontology is not concerned with knowledge, much less with mere judgments, but with the object of knowledge in so far as this object is at the same time

"transobjective", that is, independent of whether or to what extent being is actually transformed into an object of knowledge. The principles of the object in its very being are in no way *eo ipso* also cognitive principles. In some fields they can be quite heterogeneous, as the manifold admixtures of the unknowable in nearly all basic problems of philosophy amply prove. From this alone it follows that the principles of being cannot be a priori principles of our intellect, that they, as a matter of fact, are just as indifferent to the dividing line between the knowable and the unknowable as the being whose principles they are.

At this point it is incumbent upon us radically to unlearn the old and start to learn the new, not only if our approach be from the old ontology, but also if it be from the standpoint of transcendental epistemology. Of course, as far as their content goes, ontological categories can occasionally coincide with cognitive categories; and within certain limits this must be the case wherever an objectively valid knowledge of objects takes place a priori. But it must not be supposed that this occurs everywhere and without limits. The apriorism in our knowledge is subject to a very fundamental limitation, because our categories of understanding coincide at best only in part with the principles of being. This coincidence reaches farthest where it is a question of insights that are practically relevant and indispensable to the business of life -- in other words, in that field of objects to which our understanding is best suited. And correspondingly, it fails most signally where we are confronted with broad theoretical questions concerning our total world picture and its philosophical interpretation. For it is manifest that with our rational principles we can grasp a priori only that aspect of the real world which in itself is framed in accordance with those same principles.

One further step must here be taken. The statement that ontological categories are not a priori principles means simply that they cannot be immediately recognized a priori. Inasmuch as they are at all accessible to knowledge, they must be grasped by other methods. For this, a point of departure seems to offer itself in the relation between cognitive and ontological categories. We already know why this relation must involve at least a partial identity. It might then be concluded: In so far as the ontological categories are the same as the cognitive categories, it should be possible to discover the former as included in the latter. In this way one might at least be able to grasp a priori a sector of the ontological principles.

Even this hope proves deceptive. In the first place, we have no criterion to measure the extent of that categorial identity. And precisely where on practical grounds we are more or less certain of this identity-- in everyday life and for our natural orientation in the world -- this identity is philosophically worthless because it does not bear upon the problems of philosophy. But where these begin, it becomes extraordinarily questionable and soon fails us completely. In the second place, in our cognitive apparatus there is lacking one fundamental prerequisite for so exploiting this identity: an immediate knowledge of our own cognitive categories.

It lies in the nature of all knowledge to be directed not toward itself but toward its object. What, in the process of knowing, the knower becomes conscious of are traits of the object only, not traits of his own action. Least of all do the inner conditions of his action fall within his consciousness; but cognitive categories are counted among these. So, philosophy had to pass through a long historical process before it finally began to become aware of a few of the cognitive categories as such. This awareness requires a reversal of the natural cognitive direction, a turning around, as it were, from the object to the knower. And in fact with this reversal, knowledge of a second order sets in where knowledge itself is made the object of knowledge. This epistemological reflection is "secondary" and must be carried through "against" the natural attitude. When it sets in, it does not lead immediately to the categories of understanding but by a special method must be directed toward them.

This is why not only the ontological categories but even our own cognitive categories on which all knowledge a priori rests are not themselves known a priori. In fact, it must be added that generally they remain unknown in the knowledge of the object. They function in our knowledge but do not in turn become an object of knowledge. Only through the intervention of epistemological reflection are they brought to the light of consciousness. But that is a phase of knowledge reached only late in the historical process. Were the functioning of these categories in our knowledge dependent upon our knowledge of them, all human knowledge, even the most naïve, would have to await a philosophy to make them conscious. But since philosophy actually presupposes naïve knowledge, philosophy, on this hypothesis, could never have arrived at the simple understanding of objects.

Actually, the reverse order prevails: Although cognitive categories are the first condition of our knowledge -- especially of the a priori elements in it, which are nowhere absent, not even in the naïve world view -- they are not the first to be recognized in it. They are not unknowable, but can be

known only indirectly, namely as mediated through the simple knowledge of the objects which is based upon their functioning. If they are known at all, they are, we might say, rather the thing known last. And this order is irreversible. That explains why they are hardest to know. The many detours and blind alleys by which epistemology tries to arrive at them provide an unambiguous demonstration of this fact.

Thus the possibility of making ontological categories comprehensible by a detour through the cognitive categories must be considered altogether negligible. One might believe that in the last analysis it is rather the cognitive categories which can be made intelligible by a detour through the ontological categories. The latter, at any rate, lie in the natural direction of cognition--in the background of objects--albeit the simple knowledge of objects may not penetrate to them. But since all knowledge of objects has in it the tendency toward progressive advance, it may very well, by dint of a progressive deepening, lead directly to ontological categories." (pp. 13-17)

From: Nicolai Hartmann, *New Ways of Ontology*, Chicago: Henry Regnery Company 1953.

"As Hartmann sees it, categories are "the silent presuppositions" that we accept in our interpretations, explanations, and evaluations of objects. Kant had specifically identified twelve. Hegel had many more. But it can readily be shown that there is an as yet undetermined number, for every field of inquiry has its own categories. And this means that the analysis of categories must be concerned with the structure of Being -- not simply with our modes of thinking.

What makes the analysis of categories possible is the basic principle of all a priori cognition, which, as we have seen, asserts that the conditions of the possibility of experience are at the same time the conditions of the possibility of the objects of experience.

Since the world consists of integrated structures at different levels of Being, it has always been tempting to look for its basic categories either at the lowest or at the highest level. The result has been the development of speculative forms of materialism, idealism, rationalism, and theism. But in their one-sided orientations, all of these have been distortions of reality. The *new* ontology, Hartmann insists, must break with all this, and it must also break with the tradition of constructing speculative systems. Its first task must be to clarify the essential character of each of the interrelated strata, and then to deal with their interrelations. For this purpose the traditional categories of form-matter, potency-act, idea-thing, *essentia-ens*, and others are hardly adequate. To realize that the unity of the world is a specific order of interrelated strata is but the beginning of an understanding of the whole.

It is tempting to regard the stratification of reality as the result of a development -- as a genesis. But the riddle of the origin of the world -- of this universe of galaxies and cosmic interrelations, of plants and animals and human beings -- is shrouded in a mystery that is far removed from what is actually given. It is and remains one of the unsolvable metaphysical problems.

The stratification of Being itself, however, is a fact, and is observable in the world around us. The order of rank from the merely material to the spiritual is undeniable, and an analysis of categories must clarify the relationships involved. Hartmann's attempt to do so is developed in great detail in *Der Aufbau der Realen Welt*, which, in effect, is the development of a new type of ontology -- of an ontology whose first task is to clarify whatsoever exists as existing; and whose second task is to deal with the modes of Being of the existent and with their interrelations. We must keep in mind, however, that the categories pertain not to *Dasein* -- not to existence as such; but to the *Sosein* of what exists -- to the forms, structures, and contexts that are characteristic of what is real (*Aufbau*,)." (pp. 33-34)

From: William Henry Werkmeister, *Nicolai Hartmann's New Ontology*, Tallahassee: Florida State University Press 1990.

"A theory of categories that does justice to the phenomena must at least recognize the distinctions -- but must also recognize the interrelations of Being that transcend them.

For Hartmann there are only three 'cuts' (*Einschnitte*) in the real world. The most obvious one is that between nature and spirit. The great riddle here is how this 'cut' can go through the center of the human being without destroying it (*Aufbau*, 196).

A second 'cut' is that between lifeless matter and living organic nature.

The third 'cut' is that between spiritual Being and mental acts.

We thus find four main levels of what is real, and understanding the unity of the world can but mean to understand the world in its structure and stratification. What makes this possible is that, from structure to structure, we find the same relation of the higher stratum resting upon, and being conditioned by, the next lower. Despite this fact, however, the higher stratum has in each case its own mode of Being and its own type of laws. This relation of the strata characterizes the basic unity of the real world. In other words, the structure of the real world is a sequence of supportive strata -- each stratum having its own laws and its specific categorial structure.

There are, however, also categories of such generality that they are common to all strata. Their ontological significance lies in the fact that they are the unitary basis of the real world as a whole. They are the "fundamental categories" that are basic to both the real and the ideal worlds. And these categories are the special concern of a universal theory of categories.

The categorial manifoldness of the world is evident in two respects: in the distinctness of the various strata and in their rank. In this structure, cognition is ontologically secondary. It presupposes the *Seiende* that is its object; but it is itself also a *Seiendes sui generis* and can occur only in strata of a specific height -- i.e., only where there is a consciousness which transcends mere mental associations. After all, cognition is a specific function of spiritual Being, and must be understood as included in that specific stratum of the world." (pp. 38-39)

From: William Henry Werkmeister, *Nicolai Hartmann's New Ontology*, Tallahassee: Florida State University Press 1990.