

Nicolai Hartmann

Ontology: Laying the Foundations

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Ontology: Laying the Foundations

Translation and Introduction
by Keith R. Peterson

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Translator's Introduction: Hartmann's Realist Ontology

1 Hartmann in Context

Despite an international upsurge of interest in the philosophy of Nicolai Hartmann (1882–1950) in recent years, his work is still almost completely unknown to the English-language philosophical audience. Widely respected during his lifetime, he was roughly the same age as positivists Moritz Schlick and Otto Neurath, the existentialist Karl Jaspers, Catholic philosopher Jacques Maritain, and the Spaniard Jose Ortega y Gasset. Neo-Kantian Ernst Cassirer and phenomenologist Max Scheler were eight years older than Hartmann, while the philosophical rock stars of the twentieth century, Ludwig Wittgenstein and Martin Heidegger, were seven years younger than him (Harich 2004, 6). In his own era, he was not unknown to those in the English-speaking philosophical landscape with some interest in Continental philosophy. In his 1930 survey of German philosophy, the young Deweyan-Marxist Sidney Hook claimed that Hartmann was “interesting without being oracular, instructive without pedantry, and profound without being obscure,” and predicted that he “will soon be greeted as Germany’s leading philosopher” (Hook 1930, 156–57). It is no doubt difficult for readers to imagine that someone so completely unknown today might have been considered by anyone to be a “leading philosopher” of the time.

Hartmann was of Baltic German descent and an independent thinker who decisively struck out on his own in his groundbreaking 1921 *Grundzüge einer Metaphysik der Erkenntnis* (*Basic Features of the Metaphysics of Cognition*) where he repudiated the Neo-Kantianism of his former teachers Hermann Cohen and Paul Natorp in Marburg. The fact that he wrote enormous systematic works with an analytical style and with a thorough familiarity with the history of philosophy made him not easily classifiable. While he appreciated and appropriated aspects of the phenomenological approach of the early Edmund Husserl and the Munich circle, phenomenology remained for him one important method for philosophy among others, and most definitely not a philosophy that was complete in itself. Although he admired Max Scheler’s development of a “material value ethics” and his metaphysical vision, he refused to accept any metaphysics that he saw as basically teleological in orientation, and he held controversially that ethics had to be atheistic. While he respected the techniques and findings of historicists like Wilhelm Dilthey, he refused to accept the relativism that they often imply, and instead upheld the notion of the gradual historical growth of human knowledge. A relatively conservative bourgeois intellectual of the Weimar republic in

the period of his early output, like many of his generation he looked with dismay on the rapidly industrializing, culture-destroying capitalist society of the day. The fact that on the eve of WWII this well-known professor at the University of Berlin refused to begin his seminars with the mandated "Heil Hitler" is testimony to the fact that he did not think much of "the inner truth and greatness" of National Socialism as a solution to this cultural crisis.¹

One of the most prominent but poorly understood features of early twentieth century Continental philosophy was a renewal of interest in ontology and metaphysics following the decline of Neo-Kantianism. Hook's prediction that Hartmann would become Germany's leading philosopher was never realized, as Hartmann's impressive work was soon eclipsed by that of his younger contemporary, Martin Heidegger. There is good reason to believe that Hartmann, however, was the most significant figure in this revival of ontology, or the "turn of contemporary philosophy to ontology and to realism."² One of the best interpreters of Hartmann's philosophy and a former student, the late Wolfgang Harich, posed the question "who should be credited with the title 'founder of the new ontology' in the twentieth century?" On the basis of the chronology of their publications it looks like Heidegger should get credit for this, since *Being and Time* was published in Husserl's *Jahrbuch* in 1927, while Hartmann's first major ontological text, translated here as *Ontology: Laying the Foundations*, did not appear until 1935. Harich points out that this superficial chronology overlooks the fact that the "fundamental ideas for his ontology" already make an appearance in Hartmann's 1921 *Metaphysics of Cognition*, and are also "the central theme of his contribution to the *Festschrift* for Paul Natorp of 1923" (Harich 2004, 163).³ The full title of the essay just referred to reads "How is Critical Ontology Possible? Toward the Foundation of the General Theory of the Categories, Part One," and Harich notes that in the subtitle one can see that Hartmann is already dealing with the essential theme of his 1940 *Aufbau der realen Welt* (*The Structure of the*

1 This anecdote comes from Cicovacki 2002, 3. For one view of Hartmann's relation to National Socialism, see Sluga 1993. The phrase "inner truth and greatness" comes from Heidegger's 1935 *Introduction to Metaphysics* (Heidegger 2000).

2 This was the theme of the 1931 Kant-Gesellschaft meeting which featured a lecture by Hartmann (*Zum Problem der Realitätsgegebenheit*) and critical commentary by some of the leading figures of the day. It is reprinted in Hartung and Wunsch 2014, 177–264.

3 Harich goes further to claim that *Being and Time* had Hartmann's approach to ontology as one of its major targets, and that opposition to Hartmann forms the subtext of many of the discussions throughout the book in footnotes and other passages where Hartmann is not mentioned by name. He also remarks that Hartmann, after moving on to Köln, read *Being and Time* in full awareness that he was one of the targets of the critique leveled in it, and that in *Laying the Foundations* (and other works) he "struck back" against Heidegger (Harich 2004, 166).

Real World), itself subtitled “Outline of General Category Theory.” While Harich does not mention it, we could also add that another essay called “Categorical Laws” and again subtitled “Toward the Foundation of a General Theory of Categories” is published in 1926 in the *Philosophischer Anzeiger*.⁴ Even more than the first essay, whose aim is the largely critical task of revealing and correcting errors, the second essay develops what becomes Hartmann’s most original contribution to the history of ontology, the description of second-order “categorical laws” or “laws of stratification” that display the overall “structure of the real world.” We therefore agree with Harich that Hartmann deserves the credit as “founder of the new ontology.”⁵ While Hartmann may have followed through on the project of developing a new ontology that could shed new light on problems in all of traditional disciplines more than anyone else at the time, there is no doubt whose so-called “fundamental ontology” became dominant.

We can look to Harich again to get some sense of why Hook might have believed Hartmann was destined for greater renown. Harich claimed that of all his better-known contemporaries listed above, Hartmann’s “lifelong achievements are greater and more universal.” This is because Hartmann “is the only one of all of them, for the last time in the twentieth century, to have carefully created a systematic philosophy that covered all of the traditional disciplines. If we compare him with historical figures, he comes closest to Aristotle in terms of systematic breadth and depth, or even Hegel in Modern times, and in the feudal period, Aquinas” (Harich 2004, 6). With regard to his writing and thinking, Hook asserted that “no one can read [Hartmann] without being filled with high excitement, for he develops with astonishing skill the dramatic conflict of principles involved in every genuine philosophical problem” (Hook 1930, 157). Harich described Hartmann as a philosopher “skilled at subtle analyses,” with “the capacity to organize an incredibly wide range of material meticulously,” as well as someone who “knows how to masterfully deal with traditional ideas and productively take them further.” He claimed that the “anxious longing for originality is for-

4 “Kategoriale Gesetze,” reprinted in Hartung and Wunsch 2014, 123–176.

5 It is also necessary to take into account the other contributors to the revivification of the ontological tradition at the time, and to consider Hartmann’s relation to them. As he claims in the Preface below, while others “announced” the coming of a new ontology, in his own estimation Hartmann was the only one to have actually “carried it out.” There is some justification for this belief, as his four volumes of ontology alone span more than 2000 pages. In this context he mentions Hedwig Conrad-Martius, Günther Jakoby, Alexius Meinong, Max Scheler, Heidegger, Hans Pichler, and Emil Lask. Pichler is singled out as someone who “strengthened [Hartmann’s] conviction that [he] was on the right track,” but he too did not develop the new ontology. On the often obscure relationship between Hartmann’s views and those of his contemporaries, see the very valuable work of Morgenstern 2012.

eign to him," while "his writing is free of affectation and artificiality, and [...] is eminently clear, elegant, and nevertheless powerful. His books are easy to read despite the fact that they deal with highly complex problems of tremendous scope" (Harich 2004, *Ibid.*). Such high praise should help to motivate readers to tackle Hartmann's texts and reach their own conclusions about Hartmann's place in the history of twentieth century philosophy.

This translation of *Ontology: Laying the Foundations* adds to the steadily growing body of translations that aim to introduce Hartmann's writing and thinking to a broader audience. The contemporary relevance of this work to recent debates over realism, among other things, will be apparent to all upon reading the text, and I will address some specific aspects of this relevance in the third section of this introduction.⁶ In the next section, I place this work in the context of Hartmann's voluminous output and summarize its main features. My hope is that the current century will know more of Hartmann's work than the last.

2 Summary and Place of *Laying the Foundations* in Hartmann's *Oeuvre*

While he wrote at length and with significant originality on epistemology, ethics, aesthetics, philosophy of history, natural science, and many other topics, Hartmann's central preoccupation was with developing a new ontology adequate to the changed scientific and humanistic intellectual landscape of the early twentieth century. Hartmann deliberately called his approach a "critical ontology," in contrast with existing "critical realism," phenomenological idealisms, inductive metaphysics, and logical or empirical positivism. As already mentioned, he began to develop his ontological approach as early as 1921 and in the subsequent essays of 1924 and 1926. He published his truly imposing, innovative and comprehensive work on *Ethics* in 1926 as well, which includes some extensive remarks on the ontology of values in some core chapters (Hartmann 2002). If we set aside his continued strong output of essay-length work, between 1926 and 1935 his major publications include Volume 2 of his *Die Philosophie des deutschen Idealismus (Philosophy of German Idealism)* in 1929 (Hartmann 1960),

⁶ Recent translations include: *Possibility and Actuality*, the second volume of his ontology (Hartmann 2013); his *Aesthetics* (Hartmann 2014); and the essays "How is Critical Ontology Possible?" (Hartmann 2012) and "The Megarian and the Aristotelian Concept of Possibility: A Contribution to the History of the Ontological Problem of Modality" (Hartmann 2017). Secondary literature, fueled by international conferences, is also growing rapidly. English and German collections include Poli et al. 2011, Hartung et al. 2012, Peterson and Poli 2016, and Peterson 2017a.

Zum Problem der Realitätsgegebenheit (*On the Problem of the Givenness of Reality*) in 1931 (Hartung and Wunsch 2014, 177–264), as well as *Das Problem des geistigen Seins: Untersuchungen zur Grundlegung der Geschichtsphilosophie und der Geisteswissenschaften* (*The Problem of Spiritual Being: Investigations into the Foundations of the Philosophy of History and the Human Sciences*) in 1933 (Hartmann 1962). *On the Problem of the Givenness of Reality* is especially significant not only because it gets folded into Part III of *Laying the Foundations*, but because it was originally presented to a meeting of the Kant-Gesellschaft in Halle dedicated to the “turn to ontology and realism in contemporary philosophy.” Both the discussion at the meeting and its publication in issue 32 of the *Philosophische Vorträge* of the Kant-Gesellschaft included responses by a range of noteworthy discussants, including Helmuth Plessner, Moritz Geiger, Heinz Heimsoeth, and Theodor Litt, as well as a closing statement by Hartmann (Hartung and Wunsch 2014, 177–264). Subsequent to *Ontology: Laying the Foundations* he steadily churns out the remaining volumes of his ontological work, publishing *Possibility and Actuality* in 1938 (Hartmann 2013), *Aufbau* in 1940 (Hartmann 1940), and completing the fourth volume *Philosophy of Nature* in 1943 (Hartmann 1980), which was not published until all of the other volumes could be republished in 1948. The *Aesthetics*, under revision at the time of his death (1950), was later published in 1953 (Hartmann 2014).

Hartmann claims in the first Preface to *Laying the Foundations* that the book “form[s] the prelude to an ontology that I have been working on for two decades,” and he asserts that “[a] new critical ontology has become possible. The task is to make it a reality” (v). Before moving on, we should be clear about the meaning of the term “critique” employed in the phrase “critical ontology.” In *Laying the Foundations*, Hartmann insists on a point of departure “this side” of what he calls the explicit metaphysical “standpoints” of idealism and realism. The term “*diesseits*,” “this side,” virtually becomes a technical term for him. In his earlier text on Kant, “*Diesseits von Idealismus und Realismus*,” he claims that “whoever says ‘this side’ is just exercising the *epoche* [suspension of judgment] against questionable standpoints” and does not adopt either one of them (Hartmann 1924, 21). By “standpoint” he means, roughly, any philosophical approach that has become an “-ism,” or a system-building, perspective-fettered, dogmatic philosophy. “Critical” philosophy is, in contrast, problem-oriented, principally interested in what is “transhistorical” in philosophical thought, and reveals the arbitrary (metaphysical) assumptions and presuppositions in artificial standpoints in order to clear the way for productive theoretical work on philosophical problems. The “critical” principle is thus defined in terms of avoiding system-building and advocates following the problems themselves, revealing and rectifying arbitrary metaphysical assumptions wherever they arise (Hart-

mann 1924, 24–25). This is one way in which his ontology is “critical.”⁷ In its execution, the ontology aims to keep itself away from “standpoints,” but it will ultimately come down on the side of realism, as Hartmann explains in *Laying the Foundations*.

In an early English-language review of the book in 1935, the author says that Hartmann's

Ontology is a book that advances the discipline of ontology in many ways. No one interested in ontology can overlook it. I think, however, that the great value of the book lies not only in the novelty of its results, but in the method through which these numerous results are gained. [...] I know of no one in contemporary philosophy who has as conscientious an analytic as this of Hartmann's in which every fact is followed to its conclusion, every systematic form grows out of the exact analysis of the facts and the problems (G 1935, 714).

“Problems” are in fact the focus of Hartmann's careful “aporetic” methodology, which aims to provide a balanced characterization of the (potentially transhistorical) key philosophical problems in many domains, supported by a type of phenomenological description free of metaphysical prejudices, and supplemented by a constructive “theoretical” attempt to resolve these problems (or to acknowledge their irresolvability). These three methods are skillfully intertwined and enacted in this book as in others.

Hartmann's conception of “transhistorical” problems owes something to his background in Neo-Kantianism, and it plays a central role in his justification for the project of a new ontology. In response to the question that opens the Introduction, “Why should we really return to ontology at all?,” he explains that we have to engage in ontology because there are unresolved (and irresolvable) “metaphysical problems” in every philosophically relevant domain of inquiry, including the physical sciences, life sciences, psychology, logic, epistemology, philosophy of history, ethics, and aesthetics, and it is the discipline of ontology that has to deal with the manageable ontological features of such problems. The Introduction to the book is mostly dedicated to illuminating the unresolved metaphysical problematics in each of these domains of inquiry. Since there is no Conclusion to the book (Part IV simply ends abruptly), the Introduction has to serve to initially orient the reader to the landscape of issues as well as summarize some of the major features of Hartmann's overall position. One issue that threatens to derail the approach from the start is the predominance of relativism. If, according to relativists, problems change in accord with the “spirit of the age,” then this also implies that the “world” in which these problems appear

7 I have explained some other meanings of the term “critical” for Hartmann in Peterson 2012.

is relative to the “historical spiritual formation” that states and solves problems as well (8). This is not an unfamiliar point of view in our contemporary philosophy and theory. In Hartmann’s words, “we no longer believe in problems,” that is, problems that might be universal and transhistorical (3). If problems are relative, then the ontology that defines them is also relative. However, there is a tacit ontological assumption even in this relativist “standpoint,” which is that the reigning “historical spiritual formation,” or conceptual framework, is a *real* one that comes to be and passes away in time in a real world. Even extreme relativism presupposes an ontological foundation, and so is not, in its smug sophistication, somehow beyond the reach of basic ontological questions.

Hartmann explains that all domains of serious human inquiry are beset by metaphysical problems. The physical sciences do not inquire into the most basic ontological categories they use, such as space, time, matter, motion, and causality, and as a result frequently make category mistakes by attempting to reduce qualitative aspects of phenomena to quantitative mathematical relations (7). Organic life remains mysterious to us, and we always try to explain it either in terms of mechanism or of teleology, and neither set of categories is appropriate. Only an ontological analysis informed by the latest science can determine the appropriate categories. For psychology, the “mode of being of the mental” remains a puzzle (10). Objective spirit or culture has a kind of existence that is both dependent on but also independent of individuals, and its mode of being (expressed in language, morality, art, religion, science, etc.) is also highly problematic (11). Even the sphere of logic is questionable, in the sense that it is often equivocal whether logical laws are strictly cognitive or whether they have a real ontological aspect (13). The struggle of epistemology with psychologism and logicism is also an example of the problematic status of cognitive categories, and the contested difference between the process of objectification and the thing objectified shows that cognition itself is a metaphysical problem (17). Ethics too is encumbered by problematic features, including the nature of freedom and of values; the values that are expressed in moral principles have an ontological status that is both similar to and different from the ideal being of mathematical entities or of other essences. Art works reveal a complex “layering” of both real and “irreal” factors; historical investigation is shaped by metaphysical materialist or idealist assumptions relating to the primary determining factors of historical events, while there seems to be no reason to privilege one set of factors over another (24–25). All of the problems that arise in these apparently separate domains are intertwined in a sticky web of metaphysical problems that both facilitates ontological cognition and frustrates it, given our limited cognitive capacities (26). Hartmann answers the original question “why ontology?” by noting that these problems can be characterized in terms of the problematic modes of being,

types of determination, structural principles, and categorial forms that permeate these respective domains; these ontological features will remain unclear and stifle further research without much needed and disciplined ontological analysis (27). In the remainder of this section I touch on some highlights of the four major parts of the book.

The four thematic parts of the book—"being *qua* being," *Dasein* and *Sosein*, the "givenness" of reality, and ideal being—"are consolidated into a unity within which everything is reciprocally conditioned and conditioning. Each part is, in its own way, the fundamental one," according to Hartmann. They clarify the preliminary questions of ontology, and "only when we are done with them can construction begin" (34). Before we can handle questions bearing on the modes of being, types of determination, structural principles, and categorial forms that these fields entail, we need to free ourselves from inadequate (historical and current) conceptions of ontology itself.

Part I introduces the concept of "being *qua* being" and defines the ontological stance as an extension of the "natural attitude." Ontology is simply an extension of the natural attitude of everyday life and the sciences, and is to be contrasted with the reflective attitude of epistemology, logic, and psychology (45). This distinction is fundamental to his approach. Hartmann terms these the *intentio recta* and *intentio obliqua*, respectively, and defines them this way:

The natural attitude toward the object—the *intentio recta* as it were, the being-oriented toward that which the subject encounters, what comes to the fore or offers itself, in short, the orientation toward the world in which it lives and part of which it is—this basic attitude is familiar in our everyday lives, and remains so for our whole life long. By means of it we get our bearings in the world, by virtue of it we are cognitively adapted to the demands of everyday life. However, this is the attitude that is nullified in epistemology, logic, and psychology, and is bent back in a direction oblique to it—an *intentio obliqua*. This is the attitude of reflection. A philosophy that makes one of these disciplines into a basic science—as many have recently done, and as all nineteenth century philosophical theories did—will be driven of its own accord into such a reflective attitude and will have no way to escape from it. This means that it cannot find its way back to the natural relationship to the world; it results in a criticism, logicism, methodologism, or psychologism estranged from the world (46).

Ontology consists in a "return" to the natural attitude. Failure to adopt the right stance risks committing basic errors that stem from the reflective attitude. For instance, Heidegger's flawed approach consists precisely in making "what is" relative to a subject by transforming the question of being into one concerning the "meaning of Being." Since "meaning" is something that only exists for a subject, "being and the [mode of] givenness of being are virtually conflated" and "modes of givenness are presented as if they were ontological modalities" (40–41). The

“being” of things is indifferent to whatever things might be “for someone” (42). Adopting a reflective stance in ontology perverts our perspective on “being *qua* being.” In contrast, “[t]he natural, scientific, and ontological relations to the world are at bottom one and the same” (48). They all exhibit a shared stance toward the world that Hartmann calls “natural realism.” “Natural realism is not a philosophical theory. It belongs to the phenomenon of cognition and [...] is identical with the captivating life-long conviction that the sum total of things, persons, occurrences, and relations, in short, the world in which we live and which we make into our object by means of cognizing it, is not first created by our cognizing it, but exists independently of us” (49). If we make some form of reflective approach the basis of our stance, then we can only reach “objects” rather than “what is.”

The subsequent discussions of Part I review and critique both traditional and reflective conceptions of “what is.” Being as “thing,” “givenness” (what is sensibly given), “world-ground” (what is hidden and nonsensible), “substance” (in its independence, unity, persistence), “matter and form” (indeterminacy and determinacy), “essence” (universal), “individuality,” and “existence,” among others, are considered and rejected for various reasons (53–66). Reflective conceptions, including the interpretation of being as “object,” “phenomenon,” and “ready-to-hand” are considered and also disqualified. The basic thesis of reflective views is to consider “what is” to be an “object” for a subject, and all similar conceptions “create a correlativistic prejudice from the relational character of cognition and attribute to it universal ontological validity.” With many writers Hartmann agrees that cognition is a process of objectification, but they misinterpret this phenomenon and draw the mistaken conclusion “that everything that is, already purely as such, is for this reason an object for a subject” (78). In other words, the basic mistake is that an epistemological limit is transformed into an ontological principle. If we cannot know something in itself, the story goes, then an “in itself” must not exist. However, “[t]his relativity is the basic error.” Not only does being *qua* being “exist without any relation to a subject and before all emergence of subjects in the world, but it encompasses the whole cognitive relation, including the subject and its limits” (75). The distinction between object, phenomenon, etc., and something transcending them has to be preserved (80).

Part II of the book is devoted to Hartmann's novel treatment of the traditional concepts of essence and existence. About it one early reviewer states that “Hartmann's treatment of the relation of existence and essence is [...] entirely new” and “original,” and predicts that “his discussion will become decisive for all further investigation of the problem” (G 1935, 713). While “what is” may be indifferent to the wide range of historical and current characterizations of

being discussed above, there are two pairs of terms to which it is not indifferent: the contrast between the “ontological factors” of *Sosein* and *Dasein*, and the contrast between “ways of being,” namely, ideal being and real being. Much of this second major part of the book involves discussion of the way that the classical opposition between essence and existence, thought to be fundamental for ontology, has been conceived. These terms have never provided an adequate ontology of the real, and a great deal of confusion has resulted from attempts to use them for this purpose. Hartmann proposes replacing these terms with two others, *Sosein* and *Dasein*.

There is an aspect of *Dasein* in everything that is. By this is to be understood the bare fact “that it is at all.” In everything that is there is an aspect of *Sosein* as well. To *Sosein* belongs everything that constitutes something’s determinacy or particularity, everything it has in common with others, or by which it is distinguished from others, in short, every aspect of “what it is.” In contrast to the “that,” this “what” encompasses its whole content, and even its most individualized differentiation from others. It is the *essentia* expanded to include the *quidditas*, in which everything accidental is also included. We might also say that it is *essentia* “to a lower power,” as it were, brought down from the height of its exclusive universality and ideality into life and the everyday. Its depotentiation implies the rejection of pretentious metaphysical ambitions (Hartmann 1965, 85).

This is no trivial substitution of terms, since it has profound implications for ontology. The central problem is that essence and existence have been conceived to be utterly separated, and this separation has made it impossible to understand how “universal” aspects of determination play a role in the real world of particulars. The terms *Sosein* and *Dasein* allow us to reconceptualize their disjunction as a conjunction instead, at one stroke overcoming numerous problems concerning the relations between ideal and real entities, as well as between *a priori* and *a posteriori* cognition. This distinction captures our colloquial distinction between the “that” and “what” of things, without smuggling in any traditional metaphysical assumptions about the ontological status of universals or particulars.

This distinction between these two “ontological factors” is usually regarded as an exclusive disjunction by the tradition. There have been ontological, modal, logical, gnoseological, and metaphysical arguments on behalf of conceiving of them as disjunctive. Many of these come down to a misinterpretation of the phenomenon of their “indifference” to one another (e.g., the idea that essence does not entail existence). Hartmann admits that there is something phenomenologically right about this, but when essence is identified with ideal being and existence with real being, things go very wrong. We can preserve their indifference without turning it into a disjunction, and we do so with the concept of “neutral *Sosein*” (110). To simplify a complex discussion, Hartmann claims that *Sosein* is

neutral towards ideal and real being (“ways of being”). These ways of being are differentiated in terms of their *Dasein*, not their *Sosein*. This is “a complex kind of fundamental ontic relation,” obviously more complex than that of essence and existence (112). These two dimensions—ontological factors and ways of being—are perpendicular to each other.⁸ If we think about *Sosein* as the structural description or content of an entity, a triangle for example, we can see this content pertaining both to an ideal triangle or the diagram of a triangle on paper. The content is indifferent to whether it is ideal or real, outside of time or in time and space. No metaphysical assumptions about ideal being or essence are involved here. Teasing these pairs of terms apart in this way and placing them into a wider ontological context allows us to redefine the relation between *Dasein* and *Sosein* as a relation of “progressively offset identity.”

The definition of “offset identity” is initially formulated in the proposition that “every *Sosein* of something ‘is’ itself also the *Dasein* of something, and every *Dasein* of something ‘is’ also the *Sosein* of something. It is just that the ‘something’ is here not one and the same thing” (122–123). An example will help here.

The *Dasein* of the tree in its place “is” itself a *Sosein* of the forest, and the forest would be different without it; the *Dasein* of the branch of the tree “is” a *Sosein* of the tree; the *Dasein* of the leaf on the branch “is” a *Sosein* of the branch; the *Dasein* of the vein in the leaf “is” a *Sosein* of the leaf. This series may be extended in both directions; *Dasein* of the one is always at the same time *Sosein* of another. The converse is also possible: the *Sosein* of the leaf “is” the *Dasein* of the vein, the *Sosein* of the branch is the *Dasein* of the leaf, and so forth. [...] If we only look at an isolated piece of what is, then *Sosein* and *Dasein* are separated in it. If we keep the whole ontological context in view, then the *Sosein* of one is also already the *Dasein* of another—and in a definite serial order. In this way, the relation between *Sosein* and *Dasein* in the whole world approximates an identity. Since this identity deals with a progressive offsetting of the content, we may call it a progressively offset identity (123).

This “conjunctive” distinction of ontological factors is contrasted with the “disjunctive” opposition interpreted into the phenomena by the old ontology of essence and existence. The consequences of this discussion are far-reaching, since they “set ontology on a new foundation.” For instance, the distinction between substance and relation immediately fades in significance for ontology since substances (essences) have no ontological privilege over relations (existence). They equally “are” (130–131). It also means that ontology can go to

⁸ “[W]e may now say that ‘being *qua* being’ is characterized by two heterogeneous relations that intersect perpendicularly with one another; one is the conjunctive relation of ontological factors, the other the disjunctive relation of ways of being. [...] This interpenetration of conjunction and disjunction is the basic ontical schema in the structure of the world” (113).

work considering the structural categories (*Sosein*) of the world the same way that any empirical science goes about investigating laws of nature—progressively, fallibly, and on the widest phenomenal basis.

Part III covers the ontological side of cognition, its structure and embeddedness in a network of “transcendent affective acts,” as well as in the wider context of everyday life. It is the longest part of the book, and arguably the most important for understanding Hartmann's position. Its three sections tackle the topic of “givenness,” or the way that human beings perceive, cognize, and come to terms with the real world. The first section deals with the vexing topic of “being-in-itself” and its relation to cognition; section two covers a wide variety of “transcendent affective acts” in great detail, arguing that they form the context out of which the more limited and ontologically secondary capacity of cognition grows; the third section expands this insight to the whole life context, arguing that complex integrative acts ranging from value feeling and care to scientific investigation and political life in history form the vital context in which cognition takes place. All of these acts often provide better testimony to the reality of the world than does cognition itself.

Reality is “given” through varied and interlinked “transcendent acts.” “Transcendent acts are those which establish a relation between a subject and an entity that itself does not first arise through that act, or, they are acts that make something transobjective into an object” (146). Cognition is one transcendent act among others. Cognition is a “grasping” that is primarily receptive, where the subject is affected by something that is; there is also a spontaneity in the cognitive act, but this only consists in the creation of an image, concept, or representation of “what is” (148–149). This interpretation of cognition incorporates the phenomenon of “natural realism” mentioned above. The Husserlian “law of intentionality” and Hartmann's “law of transobjectivity” describe two sides of the phenomenon of cognition. The relation of intentionality exists between the act and the mental image, where consciousness “has” the “object” (but not necessarily “what is”); the relation of “grasping” exists between the act and the being-in-itself that is beyond the act. This distinction between the “object” and “being-in-itself,” however, is a product of the reflective epistemological stance itself, and is not decisive for “natural realism” or for ontology. Where cognition in the momentary, ahistorical individualist intuition of phenomena can remain in doubt about the being-in-itself of what appears, Hartmann believes that we can resolve any doubts about whether the object is or is not an appearance of something real provided we consider a broader range of phenomena that are part of the cognitive process, including “problem-consciousness” and historical “cognitive progress.” Both “problems” and “progress” on them imply the existence of something transobjective beyond the “object” that is objectified during

the process of cognition.⁹ The transobjective and “transintelligible” (or “nonrational”) can also be defined with reference to this social-historical conception of cognitive progress and the finitude of our cognitive apparatus in face of permanent insoluble problems. The finitude of our cognitive apparatus demonstrates that there are aspects of reality that we are not equipped to grasp, that there are limits to our ability to objectify, that it is limited by the categories we use to cognize, and that there is only a partial overlap between our cognitive categories and ontological principles (159–160).

In the natural attitude, cognition is integrated into a broader network of receptive, prospective, spontaneous, and reflexive transcendent affective acts that furnish us with a far more striking sense of reality than does cognition in isolation. Receptive affective acts include experiencing, living through, suffering, and enduring, where there is a clear reference to something that “befalls” the subject and reveals the “hardness of the real.” They also illuminate the way that cognition is ontologically secondary. “[O]bjects’ first of all are not something that we know, but something that ‘concerns’ us practically, something that we have to ‘face’ in life and ‘grapple’ with; something with which we have ‘to deal,’ that we have to utilize, overcome, or endure. Cognition usually limps along behind” (172). Prospective acts include expectation, readiness, presentiment, and a stronger group of acts that includes hope and fear and everything in between, as well as reckoning with chance and the feeling of dread.¹⁰ Spontaneous affective acts include willing, doing, and labor in the world. Labor includes aspects of the subject’s self-cultivation, encounter with the resistance of things and learning from the encounter. These everyday interactions and interventions show that person and thing share the same “way of being.” “The real phenomenon of labor is un-

⁹ “Cognitive progress, as the incipient knowledge of the determinate, is confirmation that in the direction extending beyond the object—above and beyond the boundary of objectification—there is a being-in-itself, something that already existed prior to and independently of the advance of cognition, and which urges itself upon problem-consciousness. This phenomenon is of great ontological significance” (155).

¹⁰ Hartmann is uncharacteristically harsh when it comes to those who privilege dread as an affect that reveals something significant about human reality. “The metaphysical deception of dread, intensified by immoral and dissolute self-torture, is the inexhaustible source of limitless error. It strikes us as bizarre when we see that sincere thinkers fall prey to this deception in their construction of philosophical theories and turn dread into an inception of self-reflection on authenticity and what is genuine in human being. Dread is precisely the worst conceivable guide to the genuine and authentic.” In a footnote Hartmann adds that “Martin Heidegger has done this in his famous analysis of dread, and indeed by giving a particular privilege to fear of death. In this he follows the most deplorable and cunning of all self-torturers known to history, Søren Kierkegaard” (182).

equivocal evidence that the sphere of the real is homogeneous in itself, i.e., that everything actual in it is ontically at the same level, and constitutes a single unified world in terms of its way of being" (200). Furthermore, in the integrative life context of labor and relations with others where these acts occur, we have the strongest confirmation that we are participants in a real world that preexists us. If we regard ourselves and others as real persons, and our moral dealings and *ethos* presuppose the existence of real goods and means to accomplish our ends, then we have the strongest evidence of the existence of the real in this context. "With this outcome, the terrain for a realist ontological investigation is now secured" (218).

Part IV complements the discussion of *Sosein* in Part II by further exploring the domain of ideal being and giving the reader a clearer conception of the way that the ideal "exists" and determines the real. The basic aporia of ideal being is that we never know in advance whether it even exists independently of our thinking it. The first section deals with this problem, and mathematical cognition provides the first testing ground. Various subjectivist arguments regarding the status of mathematics are considered and rejected, since they do not adequately explain the "phenomenon" of mathematical judgment, which assumes that mathematical objects exist in themselves. We cannot escape the subjectivist theories unless we consider the application of ideal relations in the real. He introduces the examples of the astronomer who predicts the paths of the planetary orbits, the artillery gunner who calculates trajectories according to a ballistic curve, air resistance, spin, rotation of the Earth, etc., and the engineer who calculates the load-bearing capacity of bridges, and he argues that their predictions could not possibly conform to reality if these were merely the regularities of mental acts or thoughts, since nature does not guide itself by our thought.

[W]e have to see in the mathematical element of natural relations, where we deal with mathematical entities whose laws lie at the basis of the calculability of the real, a rigorous proof for the fact that we are dealing with being-in-itself in the fullest sense of the word. Then we can say that mathematics as a science is not a mere chess game governed by mental laws, but genuine ontological cognition in the sense of transcendent grasping. The universal validity of its contents, its intersubjectivity and necessity for all individual thinkers, does not rest merely on immanent *apriority*, but on transcendent *apriority*. That which occurs in the latter is the actual self-showing of objects possessing being-in-itself, which is exhibited in every genuine vision into the thing itself. The possibility of mutual understanding, of persuasion and being convinced, does not rest on the necessity of thinking, but on the identity of the ideal object for every vision that directs itself to it. This object is the mathematical entity itself—number, magnitude, size, space, as well as their relations and lawfulness, in their ideality. These cannot originally be things of thought or of representation, because then they could not be all-pervasive relations and laws of the real (244).

The same reasoning holds for other domains of ideal being. Phenomenology's "essential interconnections," logical laws, and structural relations among values are all subsistent ideal entities, indifferent to whether we know them or not, not entities first created by our thought. The ontological significance of the ideal is revealed when its role in determination of the real becomes manifest. Certainty about whether some isolated structure is ideally existent requires a "conspicuous" vision or intuition of the whole range of interconnections, as well as the different perspectives offered by various observers, in order to achieve it (273). Moreover, different perspectives teach us that we might be wrong about something, which presupposes that there is a "something" to be wrong about. "In the consciousness of disagreement is then the completely indisputable guarantee for the fact that the essences are themselves something independent of all opinion and all evidentiality, all intuition and cognition. This means that they possess being-in-themselves" (274). Ideal being "exists" unobtrusively, remains indifferent to objectification and to its instantiation in real cases, even as it remains open to different modes of givenness or access (271).

The distinction between *intentio recta* and *intentio obliqua* that opens the way to a perspective on being *qua* being "this side" of metaphysical standpoints; a revised conception of essence and existence in terms of *Sosein* and *Dasein* that decouples them from ideal and real being as well as *a priori* and *a posteriori* cognition; a conception of cognition that acknowledges its ontological embeddedness in a network of affective acts that structure and confirm its relation to a real world; and the careful specification of the way of being of ideal structures and their relation to the real world are the main features of Hartmann's response to the "preliminary questions" of ontology in this book. "On this basis, the analysis can give itself safely over to the categorial specification of 'what is'" (218). Hartmann's subsequent three volumes of careful ontological labor carry out this categorial analysis.

3 Hartmann and Realism

Without a doubt, one of the chief reasons for Hartmann's contemporary relevance stems from his insistence on developing a critical ontology, one that can reveal inadequate metaphysical assumptions in order to carefully build a theory of categories on a realist foundation. As we have seen, Hartmann is highly critical of various post-Kantian attempts to blur or eliminate the distinction between thing-in-itself and phenomenon, putting him into conversation with recent critiques of "correlationism" and the "fallacy of being-knowledge" in speculative

realism and “new realism.”¹¹ Others have pointed out that aspects of his ethics, aesthetics, philosophy of history, philosophical anthropology, philosophy of nature, and epistemology all deserve closer attention.¹² Since we are focusing on *Laying the Foundations* here, I want to make clear just what features make his position “realist.” Following that discussion, I will mention one conventional motivation for anti-realism that becomes moot as soon as we adopt a Hartmannian outlook.

As a former student of Marburg Neo-Kantianism, Hartmann is obliged to pass through anti-realism on his way to a more nuanced form of realism. To define it, it will be helpful to consider Hartmann's stance in light of commonly accepted realist and anti-realist tenets. In *A Thing of This World: A History of Continental Anti-Realism*, Lee Braver has made a very important contribution to a more careful discussion of realism and anti-realism in contemporary Continental philosophy. He defines realism and anti-realism in terms of a limited set of theses common to realist and anti-realist thinkers. Hartmann frequently and directly confronts the central theses that Braver highlights in his “matrices” (groups of characteristic theses). Characterizing Hartmann's position in terms of them will allow readers to situate his position in the context of recent Continental realisms and the still-dominant anti-realist stance in philosophy and the humanities more broadly.

The “realism matrix” will be familiar to most readers. On Braver's account, it includes six distinct theses (five of which I include here): the first is the “independence” of the world from “the cognitive activities of the mind;” it is the claim that “the world exists independently of the mental.”¹³ The second is a definition of truth as “correspondence” between “thoughts, ideas, beliefs, words, propositions, sentences, or languages on the one hand, and things, objects, states of affairs, configurations, reality, or experience on the other; that is, between something on the side of the mind or language and something on the side of the world” (Braver 2007, 15). Next, it follows that “[i]f reality has a determinate structure independently of us and truth consists in capturing that structure, then there will be one and only one way to do so accurately” (Braver 2007, 17). This is the idea that there is “one true description of the way the world is,” at least possible in principle. These three theses entail another that is not often explicitly recognized but is a necessary presupposition for the others; namely, that cognition is a passive process of reliably and humbly “mirroring” that pre-exist-

¹¹ I have discussed some of these connections in Peterson 2016 and Peterson 2017b.

¹² See, for example, the collections Hartung et al. 2012 and Peterson and Poli 2016.

¹³ Michael Devitt cited in Braver 2007, 15.

ing reality in order to be able to provide a description of the world that is as undistorted as possible (Braver 2007, 23). I would add that this implies not just a vague “philosophy of mind,” but a whole philosophical anthropology that includes substantive theses about the relation between mind and body, the “place of the human in nature,” the nature of knowledge production in the social world, etc. Finally, realism about the world entails a realism about the subject who knows the world, and this subject is universally the same, a “fixed ahistorical human nature” (Braver 2007, 49). Let me contrast the central tenets of anti-realism with these before going on to articulate Hartmann’s nuanced response to anti-realism.

The “anti-realism matrix” unsurprisingly consists of the opposites of these theses. In contrast to the mind-independence of the world, Kant and many thinkers influenced by him assert the mind-dependence of the world. Famously for Kant, since we can only talk about the “world” as it appears to us, i.e., in terms of our given sensory and cognitive apparatus, we cannot assume that our minds have a special intimate contact with reality as it is “in itself,” which the dogmatic metaphysicians of all ages have believed. The phenomena are the objects of Newtonian science. Kant’s conception of the phenomenon-noumenon distinction significantly complicates this, but the general attitude of most post-Kantians has been that this distinction is simply unnecessary, and in Hegel’s words, “appearance becomes identical with essence” (Hegel, cited in Braver 2007, xx). (Recent Continental realists have identified a fallacy in this maneuver that they term “correlationism” or “the fallacy of being-knowledge” characteristic of “philosophies of access.”¹⁴) This means that a rejection of the correspondence theory of truth is also shared by anti-realists, since if there is nothing independent of the mind for judgments to correspond to, some other account of truth will have to be adopted (e.g., truth as intersubjective agreement, coherence, or “enhancement of the feeling of power”). Additionally, if there is no independent reality and what we say about it does not correspond to anything “in itself,” then there cannot be “one true description” of the way things are, but there may be as many “true” descriptions as there are subjects who generate them. Braver calls this an “ontological pluralism” in contrast to the “uniqueness” thesis of realism, but this often simply amounts to relativism rather than pluralism. Kant himself did not fall prey to this slide into relativism because, despite the fact that he is the first to make the counter-thesis of the “active subject” the core feature of his entire approach, all active knowers have exactly the same set of cognitive faculties which lead them to make the same judgments

14 See Bryant et al. 2011 and Ferraris 2014 for definitions and discussion.

about the phenomena they experience, and so they can arrive at the single true scientific account of the natural world (Braver 2007, 49). Active knowers do not simply passively receive data from an independent world, but bring order and regularity into that world as soon as they open their eyes or utter a judgment about their perceptions. According to Kant's Copernican Revolution the "ordering of experience is an autonomic process" that "constantly operates in the background" (Braver 2007, 35). The importance of this "active knower" thesis for Kant and post-Kantianism cannot be overestimated and will receive separate discussion below. Finally, in contrast to Kant, many Continental anti-realists do not accept that knowing subjects are everywhere the same, but that perspectives vary across and even within the same subject ("plural subject"). It should be noted that although Kant may be regarded as the founder of anti-realism, his own position reflects a combination of realist and anti-realist theses (as Hartmann also recognized). As Braver summarizes it: "Instead of abandoning realism altogether [...] he retains two important aspects of it: the mind-independent noumenal realm and the realist subject. Although he makes the phenomenal world mind-dependent and changes the passive substantial knower to an active organizer of experience, he must keep the experience-organizing structures universal and unchanging in order to preserve the unique world."¹⁵ In light of the overall features of the position developed in *Laying the Foundations*, we see that Hartmann's stance also turns out to entail a subtle recombination of these theses.

First, although Hartmann frequently uses the term "independence" to speak about objects of cognition, he argues that this is actually not the right term to use in an ontological context. "Independence" only makes sense against the background of an already-assumed or potential "dependence" of objects on consciousness in light of skeptical arguments. Hartmann finds that what is usually implied here is that things in relations to subjects are somehow "less in being" than things independent of subjects. The dependence-independence opposition is thus already an ontologically charged evaluative opposition that misleads us about "what is as such." Hartmann argues that both the independent and the dependent have the same mode of being; the antiquated idea of "degrees of being" secretly informs the dependence-independence distinction but simply does not apply to "what is." The better term for designating the "independence" of "what is," ontologically speaking, is simply "indifference." "What is," whether it is dependent or independent, is indifferent to being cognized or related to in any way by anything. This sense of indifference may already be implicit in many statements of the realist thesis, but the term "independence" can lead us astray.

¹⁵ Braver 2007, 57. Parenthetical references have been removed.

This indifference thesis applies to cognition when Hartmann retains the realist distinction between thing and thought for epistemology: “objects” may be mind-dependent “images,” but the transobjective “being-in-itself” remains indifferent to thought.

Hartmann believes he is being a true Kantian here, a belief supported by his contrarian reading of Kant’s “supreme principle.” Readers will recall Kant’s principle: “the conditions of the possibility of experience in general must at the same time be the conditions of the possibility of the objects of experience” (Kant, 1998, 283; A158/B197). In his earlier essay on Kant, Hartmann argued that this expresses a “restricted identity thesis.” The principles or conditions of both are neither completely identical nor completely different. The principle itself is entirely “this side” of the distinction between idealism and realism, as Hartmann reads it, and can be interpreted in the direction of placing the conditions of experience inside the subject (Kant’s solution) or *both* within *and* beyond the subject in the world. Hartmann claims that Kant’s idealistic answer to the question, which makes these conditions internal to the cognizing subject, results from his own “dogmatic prejudice.” He believes a solution that remains faithful to the phenomenon of cognition can be proposed that places the principles or conditions of experience not within the subject but within the wider reality of which both subject and object are parts. The at least partial identity between subject and object which conditions the possibility of knowledge results from the fact that both subject and object are determined by some shared ontological principles structurally superior to both. These principles are what Hartmann calls categories. Finally, in contrast to the stigmatic and individualist assumptions of Modernist epistemology, Hartmann argues that problem-consciousness and cognitive progress take place in historical duration in a community of knowers, some of whom may have different perspectives, allowing a progressive correction of our views about the world. This position is substantially supported by showing how the indifference of things is firmly established by noncognitive affective transcendent acts (e.g., suffering and hoping) in the context of which we exercise our cognitive faculties, which do not give as vivid a testimony to the “hardness of the real.”

Secondly, his take on “correspondence” is just as nuanced. There is “correspondence” between our models and the world in the restricted sense that there are referents for them, but this relation does not at all imply “mirroring,” resemblance, or similarity. We make models that approximate and somehow conform to the real but do not mirror it. An image, model, judgment, concept, or sentence referring to the food on your plate does not in any way “resemble” the food itself. The terms “fit” or “conformation” might be better to describe this relation, but

Hartmann is not more specific about this relation in *Laying the Foundations*.¹⁶ Thirdly, given this “looser” conception of correspondence, in addition to his acceptance of the two Kantian principles that human finitude does shape the way that reality is “given” and that there are “perennial” metaphysical problems, there can never be a complete and unique description of the world for human knowers. There are things we will simply never know—the nonrational or transintelligible elements of reality, permanent problems—and cognition is a collective, but limited, historical process of the growth of knowledge. We could call this a form of realist ontological pluralism.¹⁷

Fourthly, Hartmann moderates the Kantian “active knower” thesis by regarding knowers as both active and passive at once. They are active in the production of the image, concept, or object of cognition, but also passive in receiving more or less determinate input from the things themselves. There are various modes in which “what is” can be “given” to us, not some single bedrock mode, and it is the noncognitive modes more than cognition itself which guarantees our conviction that we are dealing with a world indifferent to our attempts to know it or to satisfy our desires in it. Finally, on the topic of “perspectivism” (the anti-realist response to the realist thesis of a “fixed ahistorical human nature”), Hartmann neither atomizes descriptions into as many perspectives on the world as we find nor insists on a “fixed ahistorical human nature” or knowing subject. Hartmann’s rejection of artificial standpoints in favor of foregrounding the “problems themselves” leads to the potentially dynamic and progressive conceptions of both subject and world that are open to change while remaining stable, or becoming increasingly “stabilized,” through their historical vicissitudes. We have to distinguish between “standpoints,” which are dogmatic metaphysical commitments, and more modest “perspectives,” which may vary in the sense of a “situated epistemology” but relate to the same real world. For Hartmann it is possible to achieve a standpoint-free (but not necessarily perspective-free) assessment of enduring problems and make informed attempts to resolve them.

There is nothing threatening or disturbing about this modest form of realism. The real question is why sophisticated thinkers continue to resist accepting some form of realist ontology and cling instead to the trite anti-realist slogan that “nature is nothing but our conception or description of nature.” As I see it, while the specific motivations for different authors may differ given their situated conditions, there has been a shared motivation for anti-realism from Kant to the pre-

¹⁶ On the term “conformation,” see Longino 2002.

¹⁷ Compare to more recent discussions of “realist pluralism” in Dupré 1995 and Longino 2002.

sent. It is humanistic anthropocentrism—the notion that human dignity is somehow insulted by a realist stance. I'll say a few words about this before closing.

Braver remarked on Kant's consistency in his emphasis on "autonomy" both in his ethics as well as in his epistemology. A "legislative" mind is at work both in ethics and in cognition. "Rather than humbly following after God's creation or passively recording the intrinsic structure of the world, we boldly form the phenomena. Deleuze describes this colorfully: 'The first thing that the Copernican Revolution teaches us is that it is we who are giving the orders'" (Braver 2007, 37). I suggest that this ethico-political metaphor should not merely be taken as metaphorical. Kant's conception of freedom as self-legislation (agents "giving the orders" but also "taking orders" *only from themselves*) is obviously consistent with an epistemology founded on the concept of a real "active knower" who legislates for nature (as a domain a lawful regularity). We have to keep in mind the Enlightenment impulse behind Kant's desire to free people from their "self-imposed tutelage:" no king or god tells the autonomous agent what to do, although we may very well freely decide that one or the other of them is right in the end. The practical or ethical dimension of human experience is the larger context for the cognitive dimension. Realism (or dogmatism) in epistemology—regarding the world as something to which we must passively conform—has been considered to be dangerous because it may lead to determinism or authoritarianism in ethics and politics. The pervasiveness of a vague assumption like this allows us to make sense of much of the adherence to anti-realism in 20th century European philosophy. Taking the subject to be an active term in the constitution of "experience" makes it far less likely that determinism in ontology and authoritarianism in politics can take hold. Therefore, realism has to be opposed.

This "holistic" conception of human autonomy was one of the chief features of the Neo-Kantianism that Hartmann himself opposed. Neo-Kantianism was not exclusively dedicated to establishing a rational reconstruction of the sciences, it sought "to root itself firmly in the total creative work of culture." It not only reflects on the methods of the sciences, but also on

practical forms of social order and the life of human dignity for the individual living within these, artistic creation and the aesthetic sculpting of life, and even the most intimate forms of religious life. For [...] it is the generative act which creates all manner of objects. Only humankind builds its own human essence and, by objectivating itself therein, imprints in the deepest and most completely unified manner the character of its spirit onto its world. There is indeed a whole world of such worlds, all of which humankind can call its own.¹⁸

18 Passages from Paul Natorp's "Kant and the Marburg School" in Luft 2015, 182, 186.

These creative acts are an expression of human “spontaneity,” and “‘spontaneity’ is both law on the one hand, and real fulfillment of spontaneous determination on the other, which receives nothing from the outside” (Luft 2015, 186). The emphasis on autonomy and creativity builds the humanistic bridge between cognition and action, and reaffirms the famous Kantian “primacy of the practical.”

The problem with this kind of approach is that, aside from the fact that it illegitimately identifies realism and determinism, it attempts to resolve ethical and political problems in an *a priori* fashion by building a specific conception of freedom into the very definition of the human being. Hartmann, for one, rejects this thesis of the Kantian “primacy of the practical” that leads to the precipitous assumption that apparently motivates much anti-realism.¹⁹ On Hartmann's account of cognition and ethics, there is no reason to make this assumption, and so there is no reason to attempt to solve political problems through epistemo-ontological means. This continued assumption is problematic not just because it begs the question, but because the social and political context has changed. Humanistic, anthropocentric anti-realism itself does not provide resources for a solution to real-world problems if it cannot even clearly articulate the structure of the life context in which it is embedded, a context that is often indifferent to whether or not human beings come to understand it.

Anti-realism itself has become dangerous for societies on the verge of environmental collapse, for instance—we cannot rightly research and try to resolve environmental problems and get people to act in response to them if nature is nothing but “our construction.” Anti-realism at its worst thus aids and abets anthropocentric humanism and its exploitation of both nature and human “Others” since it claims there is no “real” nature “out there” in the first place. Environmentalism *requires* some kind of realism even to get its project of social change off the ground. Capitalism and high technology have only apparently relieved humankind of its radical and asymmetrical dependence on nonhuman nature; real relations of dependence are in evidence as we experience the effects of continuing to negligently pump carbon into the atmosphere, pollute the water supply, degrade the soil, and poison ourselves with synthetic chemicals. Liberation projects for nature and of oppressed human groups alike are at a minimum based on the idea of real, active subjects who recognize the existence of real natural structures and processes as well as real oppressors in a world not of their own making. This minimal kind of realism says nothing about how we collectively choose to respond to real world problems. We can organize for social change in

¹⁹ Hartmann's rejection of “the primacy of the practical” is implied in his discussion of the “antinomy of freedom” in Kant's first *Critique*. See Hartmann 1924, section 6.

light of higher values, or we can continue to be duped by ideology and experience greater suffering in the long run.

Hartmann's philosophical anthropology and value theory make room for freedom not only in the relation of the subject to natural regularities, but also in relation to cultural and moral values. While ideal, such values do not govern ethical behavior the way that ideal logical laws structure (logical) thinking and nature's essential structures govern real relations. They motivate but do not determine agents to act or realize them. There is thus no threat of determinism in this form of realist ontology because Hartmann rejects the assumption that in order to guarantee political freedom we need a purely active and spontaneous subject somehow exempt from causal laws. These are simply two different issues. Carefully teasing apart the elements of recurring problems, providing more adequate phenomenological descriptions of them, and employing new and innovative categorial distinctions to resolve them are some of the things that Hartmann's works can teach us how to do. *Laying the Foundations* provides numerous examples of this kind of work, and it will hopefully draw the reader into a fresh, rich, and varied philosophical landscape within and beyond it that still remains largely unexplored.

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