

Nicolai Hartmann International Conference 2025
September 25th-26th

Abstracts

September 25th

Luis Fernando Mendoza Martinez (*National Autonomous University of Mexico*)
Notes on the Socio-Political Structure of the Question on Being as Such

In the history of Western philosophy, the question of being as such has regularly been interpreted as a theoretical or scientific matter. And related to this, the question of human knowledge, how and to what extent it is possible, has been linked to this theoretical-scientific framework. The historical result of this regular interpretation, based on the latest findings of neuroscience, is that the question of how it is possible to be in any way connected to being itself is seen as meaningless. Ultimately, reality is an interpretation of the living minds. Being as such is unreachable; 'being' is what appears and makes sense to each mind, individually or collectively. The appropriate language to address this situation is phenomenological discourse, as it has taken place at least in the last century.

Hartmann's philosophical project is the attempt to assert that not only philosophy, theory and science, but the whole of human existence is concerned not only with meaning, but also with being itself. In my talk, drawing on ideas from Plato, Dilthey and Hartmann, I will attempt to show that this affectedness is key to understanding the socio-political structure of the question of being-in-itself, and how this question arises precisely against the seemingly complete domination of meaning in human experience. I will then attempt to show that the framework for an adequate understanding of human cognitive experience, which is to grasp being as such, has this socio-political structuring. In this context, the distinction between being for me — or even for us (humans)— and being *per se* emerges as a crucial experience for human existence and its purposes. The result of this experience is the idea of a critical ontology or, in accordance with our Western tradition, metaphysics. From this perspective, metaphysics can emerge as a response to specific socio-political needs, rather than as a purely theoretical and scientific task, detached from the issues related to human action. From this perspective, it may be possible to rethink and criticize the socio-political implications of metaphysical perspectives that, from a theoretical-scientific point of view, deny access to the essence of what happens in human existence.

Predrag Cicovacki (*College of the Holy Cross, USA*)

Hartmann's Personalism

In my presentation, I will examine whether Hartmann defends a version of a personalist philosophy, and if so, what its main features are.

Hartmann assumes that persons are irreducible, without invoking the image of the private subject, that is, without subjectivism. Personalism is a complex and nuanced view, and for the sake of my paper, I will employ a modified formulation of Kant's categorical imperative. So interpreted, personalism urges us so to treat reality, in every one of its manifestations, as an end and never as a means only. Thus interpreted, personalism is directed not only against instrumentalism, but also against reductivist materialism and a Sartre-inspired version of existentialism; it argues against the discontinuity of being and the treatment of epistemology or psychology as prior to ontology. Personalism argues in favor of a closer, more intimate tie with reality, in favor of understanding reality by means of a bond, rather than in terms of the self-sufficiency of each individual being. Within such a framework, there is room for vital, utilitarian, and pragmatic values, but they are never treated as the highest values.

After establishing the main features of a personalistic approach to reality, my goal will be to provide a more detailed and specific understanding of Hartmann's personalism by comparing his views with those of a few other contemporary philosophers.

Alicja Pietras (*University of Silesia in Katowice*)

Social Ontology Between Spirit and Psyche: The Need for a New Conceptualization of Socio-Cultural Being

The topic of my presentation is the question of the necessity for a new conceptualization of the categories of spirit and psyche, referring, on the one hand, to Nicolai Hartmann's multi-layered ontology of real being, and, on the other hand, to the findings of recent research in the social sciences and humanities, as well as to the non-idealist social ontology inherently connected to them (Jenkins, 2024).

I will present the problem by means of a case study. I will attempt to show—using the example of gender identity, a topic now widely discussed within both the social sciences and the humanities—that contemporary social ontology lacks a sufficiently precise conceptual distinction between the psychic layer and the socio-cultural (or spiritual) layer. This absence significantly hinders the theoretical description of observed phenomena. I argue that the failure to differentiate these two categorically distinct, though partly overlapping, layers within the structure of the world results in an ontological picture in which there is no room for understanding newly recognized phenomena such as non-binarity. Discussions surrounding gender identity—especially in public discourse, but to some extent also in academic and philosophical debates—still too often rely on a kind of ontological dualism, in which there is room only for sex as a biological category and gender as a cultural category (in other words: sex and gender).

However, the adoption of an ontological theory that posits the necessity of acknowledging an intermediate psychic layer between the organic (biological) and the spiritual (cultural) layers both complicates the issue and yet is not at all in conflict with the methodological principle of Ockham's layer. As it turns out, in this case the phenomena revealed and described by psychology themselves create the need to multiply layers of being.

By drawing on Hartmann's conceptualization of the levels of real being, I will attempt to show that in the theoretical account of gender identity, we must clearly distinguish between three ontologically separate levels of sex: biological sex, psychic gender identity, and socio-cultural gender. In light of this and many other contemporary issues—unknown in Hartmann's time—I argue for the necessity of a new conceptualization of the category of socio-cultural being in its relation to psychic being. One of the major challenges of contemporary social ontology is to draw a

clear ontological (categorical) boundary between psychic being and personal spiritual being in light of the most recent phenomena described by contemporary social and human sciences.

Jordi Claramonte & Gema Hernandez Gomez (*Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia*)
Marx, Lukàcs and Hartmann's Modal Ontology

As it is well known, the great Marxist philosopher Gyorgy Lukàcs was not too prone to indulge with none of his contemporary bourgeois thinkers such as Sartre or Heidegger. The rare and crucial exception though, would be found in his sustained references to the works of Nicolai Hartmann.

If we are to take into account Lukàcs' directions, Hartmann's work would be absolutely key -as no one else could be- to recover the ontological dimension and strength of Marxian thinking and praxis, thus contributing to size down the epistemological approach which had been hegemonical both in some Neokantianism as in most of the final results of phenomenology.

Following Lukàcs inspiration, we shall now explore what we believe to be one of the most relevant contributions of Hartmann's philosophy to understanding key Marxian articulations such as the one that puts to work together the means, forces and modes of production.

Traditionally when "means of production" were invoked, they would include mostly repertoires of physical assets such as land, factories, machinery, raw materials, and other infrastructures needed for production.

On the other hand, "forces of production" would be considered to encompass not only the physical and mental capabilities of workers, including their skills, knowledge, and willingness to work but also their sustained disposition to consistently improving and reshaping the means of production themselves.

Finally the "modes of production" or "modes of relation" would refer to the distinct ways a society combines and organizes social relations as well as the ongoing articulations of productive means and forces of production.

And it is precisely here where an absolutely vital contribution by Hartmann comes to the fore. Such contribution will come right out of Hartmann's second volume of his Ontology, the one devoted to modal ontology and thinking. Hartmann's distinct and rare approach to modality will emerge from critically recovering ontological approaches such as the ones offered by Megarian scholars whose work differed greatly from Plato's and Aristotle's themselves. Consequently, instead of limiting themselves with Aristotelian dualist approaches as the dynamis/energeia or potency and act these modal thinkers and Hartmann himself will transit from two to six putting forward the complete modal panoply which deals with the relative modes: Necessity/Contingency and/or Possibility/Impossibility and the absolute modes: Effectiveness/Ineffectiveness.

The final purpose of this paper is to show how much our understanding of the consistency and the interplay between means, forces and relations can improve if we start thinking modally.

Modally means of production will show not only a sustained "repertorial" character emphasizing the tendency to coherence and completeness inherent to the mode of Necessity, but it will also introduce the decantations of Contingency which will appear as any given repertoire comes to lose inner tension.

At the same time we might refine our intelligence of forces of production considering them under the mode of Possibility, which gives these forces a neat centrifugal orientation. Such an orientation can be of the greatest importance while it brings about dynamics of critical exploration and change but it will also have to deal with the modal moment of Impossibility if change becomes sterile and does not find its way back into any given or emerging mode of production.

As it is customary the relative modes of Necessity and Possibility -or means and forces of production- will contradict and complement each other as they deploy in some distinct landscape where they will appear under the absolute mode of the Effective or will engage in collapse and extinction processes under the absolute mode of the Ineffective.

As an example of the fertility and complexity of Hartmann's modal ontology we will go back to chapter XXIV of "Das Kapital" and discuss the famous maneuvers of the Duchess of Sutherland and the dynamics of decoupling and accumulation that modal thinking will allow us to better conceive and question.

Antoni Płoszczyńiec (*University of the National Education Commission*)

Nicolai Hartmann and Transhumanist Gnosis

The proposed presentation aims to demonstrate the relevance of Nicolai Hartmann's thought. The author of the presentation is working on a research project that aims to present the Gnostic character of transhumanism and to critique transhumanist concepts of salvation. Reflection on oneself has shown that many critical remarks about transhumanist gnosis have grown out of Hartmann's inspiration. The paper will highlight certain elements of Hartmann's philosophy that allow us to question the scientific promises of salvation.

After presenting the objectives of the paper, the author will begin by explaining why he treats transhumanism as a form of gnosis. The justification for this is that transhumanists, like the ancient Gnostics, attribute salvific power to knowledge, offering metaphysical (in traditional meaning of this term), eudaimonological or ethical salvation. It is also knowledge available only to some, by virtue of which man saves himself (the saving subject is also the saved). Transhumanism significantly changes the nature of salvific knowledge, because instead of esoteric and speculative knowledge, we are dealing with what is referred to in the Anglo-Saxon tradition as 'science'.

The presentation will draw attention to the specificity of philosophical thought, which cannot be replaced by mathematical-natural science. It will also be pointed out that many fundamental philosophical questions are of an aporetic-metaphysical nature (in Hartmann's meaning of term 'metaphysical') and therefore cannot be unconditionally resolved in theoretical reflection, let alone in the practical 'solving' of ultimate human problems through technology.

The author of the presentation will also refer to Hartmann's theory of emergence. Emergentism allows us to question the reduction of man to his own neurological apparatus or bundle of information (data), which is the most common anthropological-ontological assumption of transhumanists.

Finally, the author of the presentation will refer to issues of an ethical and axiological nature. It will be emphasized that many eschatological 'offers' of transhumanism are reductionist in nature (e.g. radically hedonistic) and thus offer an unattractive vision of salvation. It will also be noted that the top-down teleological determinism of transhumanists destroys the ethos of human responsibility and is destructive to the meaning of an individual's life (with the difference that the theistic God is replaced by a quantic God-Machine). The conclusion from these considerations can be formulated as follows: the axiological sphere is too multifaceted for humans to solve its problems in the practical sphere – for all eternity.

Discussion Panel: *Hartmann and Social Ontology*

Panelists: Alicja Pietras, Predrag Cicovacki, Luis Fernando Mendoza Martinez

Moderator: Magdalena Wolska-Augustyn

Questions:

What do you understand by social ontology? Could you list those elements of Hartmann's project which you find the most relevant for the matters of your concern?

How would you picture the possibilities of a fruitful dialogue between Hartmann and feminism, gender studies and decolonial studies?

How can Hartmann's works on spiritual being be considered in questions related with the human search for meaning?

September 26th

Keith Peterson (*Colby College*)

***Problemgeschichte* and Environmental Philosophy: Applying Hartmann's Aporetics**

This paper presents the history and current state of environmental philosophy in terms of its enduring problems. Neo-Kantianism is known for introducing an approach to the history of philosophy as *Problemgeschichte*. At the geographical poles of neo-Kantianism, both Natorp and Windelband adopted a problem-based approach, though Windelband's became more widely known. Hartmann's account includes elements of both Natorp's and Windelband's conceptions, but he takes them in a definitively realist direction in his turn away from the neo-Kantianism of his teachers. This approach was actively developed by Hartmann and integrated into his three-part methodological model of phenomenological description, aporetic discussion, and theoretical explanation. The central claims in this talk are that aporetics should be an essential part of environmental philosophy as well, and that a particular Hartmannian realist model of problems is most appropriate for it. Three central problems characterize contemporary environmental philosophy—the problem of anthropocentrism, the problem of the intrinsic value of nature, and the problem of ecological worldview—and I argue that what I call “ecological materialism” is an appropriate theoretical response to them. As an example of aporetic discussion, I consider the problem of an “ecological worldview” and the “worldview clash” model prominent in much environmental thought and argue that while the discourse of worldviews seems compelling for environmentalism, it is counterproductive and riddled with paradoxes. This paper shows that Hartmann's methodology has tremendous relevance for contemporary philosophical research.

Ana Mateos Calvo (*Autonomous University of Barcelona*)

Nicolai Hartmann's Concepts of Categorical Stratification and Dependence as Foundations of an Environmental Philosophy

In order to understand any thought about the environment, we must first establish what we mean when we talk about environmental philosophy. In this lecture, I will argue that environmental philosophy is the philosophical discipline that considers the environmental relationship, that is, the relationship that any entity, living or inorganic, maintains with its environment or the world around it. The environmental philosophical project I seek to explore aims primarily to study the ontic structure of both the entity and the environment, as well as how this mode of relationship exists in the world, which is composed of a special mode of affecting-being affected.

My previous research has led me to conclude that Nicolai Hartmann's philosophy provides a solid starting point for laying the foundations of a philosophical system focused on environmental thought. Given the extensive nature of the German philosopher's literature, this presentation will focus on two of the most important concepts from the third volume of his *Ontology. The structure of the real world* (in the original German: *Der Aufbau der realen Welt: Grundriß der allgemeinen Kategorienlehre* (1939)), which I consider to be the cornerstone of any philosophical system that seeks to address environmental issues. I refer here to the concepts of categorical stratification and categorical dependence.

First, I will argue that every ecosystem, as well as every living being, must be understood as a stratified entity, characterized by the presence of four strata: the inorganic, the organic, the psychological, and the social-objectified (concept coined by Jordi Claramonte in his book *Estética Modal: Libro Segundo* (2021)). To illustrate this position, I will present examples drawn from real ecosystems, focusing primarily on the Doñana National and Natural Park in Andalusia, southern Spain, as a case study. I will defend the view that, in order to grasp the complexity of this natural environment—as well as the human relationship with it—it is pertinent to rely on Nicolai Hartmann's stratified ontology. In summary, the characterization I will offer of each stratum is as follows: the inorganic as the foundation of the environmental system, represented by the park's hydrology, exposed soil, and dunes; the organic as biodiversity; the psychological as the perceptual and sensorial; and the social-objectified as the stratum encompassing social, cultural, political, and ethical dimensions. In this presentation, I will defend the idea that the four strata are applicable to all living beings without exception, thereby departing from Hartmann's original proposal.

Secondly, I will argue that one of the most important notions for understanding any environmental relationship is the concept of categorical dependence. According to Hartmann's Laws of Dependence, every higher stratum rests upon the lower ones. Thus, every human society, characteristic of the fourth stratum, is grounded in lower strata that condition it. As I will demonstrate, this ontological relationship of dependence is clearly evident in the case of Doñana. Furthermore, I will address the environmental ethical problem present in this area, since any political decision taken from within the "fourth stratum" has the potential to significantly alter the entire stratified system.

Finally, I will draw upon the research previously conducted by another key author: Keith R. Peterson, who also advocates for the application of these concepts as foundational to an environmental philosophy (2020). Additionally, I will align myself with Peterson's critique of flat ontologies (2016), which fail to account for the complexity of reality—particularly that which pertains to environmental matters—due to their lack of the concepts of stratification and, above all, ontological dependence.

Carmen Garcia-Blanco (*Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia*)
Is It Quantum Mechanics a New Metaphysics? What Hartmann Has to Say

The United Nations declared 2025 as the International Year of Quantum Science and Technology. For this reason, articles about quantum physics are increasingly common in non-specialized media. We have all surely heard about particles entangled at a distance, quantum superposition, teleportation of information, and quantum computing.

Moreover, especially if we delve a bit further into the topic, we will be able to easily find a great deal of information about theories related to one of the problems that has remained unsolved for a century: the collapse of the wave function and the related wave-particle duality, which raise amazing implications such as bringing to the fore of science the doubt about the existence of reality beyond the observer.

At this point, we consider it essential to turn to Hartmann's thought and focus on a selection of ideas contained in his "Ontology" which will prove to be absolutely fundamental to a lucid approach to the quantum realm.

The controversy originated from Einstein's questioning of the so-called Copenhagen interpretation leads to a confrontation between two views: realism defended by Einstein or Schrödinger, and irrealism defended by Bohr and others. According to the latter, the fact that the observer influences the construction of reality makes it impossible to confirm—or rather, prove—its existence beyond the presence of the observer.

Our aim in this paper is to explore the significant ways Hartmann's modal analysis can help to address and definitely bring light to the problem of quantum reality versus classical reality. Additionally, we will also defend the importance of his contribution to the philosophy of science.

To begin with, and regarding quantum reality, we will refer to the modal analysis presented by Hartmann in the second volume of his *Ontology*, as it will be key to our hypothesis. In this respect, both relative modes—Necessity/Contingency and Possibility/Impossibility—and the absolute ones—Effectiveness/Ineffectiveness—, together with his categorial theory, will provide a unique frame to deal with the quantum issue.

Moreover, in the fourth volume of his *Ontology*, Hartmann conducts a detailed analysis of space and time as fundamental dimensions for understanding the natural world, something already done before but not with such a "scientific approach", by means of which he also considers four-dimensional spacetime, entering the realm of theoretical physics and referring to concepts related to the theory of relativity.

Furthermore, he also mentions the emergence of probability in scientific matters and the quantization of energy, both direct references to quantum physics. He even proposes the possible quantization of space and time, something that is present in certain current physical theories.

In summary, his dimensional analysis clearly shows an intention to give science its place while, at the same time, identifying the dividing line—or more precisely, the intersection— between positive sciences and philosophy.

In this sense, we will highlight Hartmann's relevance to the philosophy of science, as his ontological work analyzes the world in its complexity, avoiding any dualistic approach, and acting as a precursor to what will be later studied in complexity sciences, which treat reality and phenomena as interconnected complex systems at different levels. Particularly, in the general theory of categories presented in the third volume of his *Ontology*, Hartmann proposes a layered vision of reality through four different interconnected strata with a non-hierarchical emergence relation regulated by the four laws of stratification, in such a way that we may say that reality results in self-organized and complex systems with autonomy to emerge and transit to different ones.

To sum up, Hartmann's modal apparatus can be extremely useful for dealing with quantum systems in which the modes of necessity, possibility, and actuality —and its negative counterparts— are fundamental. At the same time, his theory of categories is highly relevant when it comes to having the tools to address quantum reality as another level of reality for which description we do not yet have all the necessary categories. And, eventually, his stratified vision of reality as an interconnected system offered an incredibly innovative perspective in relation to the complexity theories that would come later.

Adriana Wierzbą (*Eugeniusz Geppert Academy of Art and Design in Wrocław*)

Relations Between Values, Values of Relations. On Aesthetic Sensitivity and the Tasks of Photography Based on the Works of Nicolai Hartmann

Based on Nicolai Hartmann's *Aesthetics*, I pose the question of the relation between values from different classes. I want to relate the answers to a new art, namely photography, which has experienced its axiological triumphs and downfalls since the publication of "Aesthetics". The analyses reveal not only the relations between values, but also the significance of relationality itself in art or culture. It is worth taking this opportunity to consider the actuality of the division of value groups and, with a few examples, their research interpretations present in aesthetic theory in the 20th and 21st century. On the one hand, we should recognize the influences between value classes and, on the other hand, make the mutuality of these influences a certain medium for the interpretation of contemporary aesthetic sensitivity. Among others, it is ethical, spiritual and social values that influence the understanding of aesthetic and artistic values. Nevertheless, do these influences

imply the need to set new tasks for visual art? If so, how conclusive is this postulate? Do aesthetic and artistic values influence other values to the same extent? The art of photography carries the potential for an interdisciplinary search for answers to questions about the world. Perhaps, artists reach for the camera when they have to face the world and words prove insufficient. Perhaps philosophers engage in aesthetic theory when they want to focus on the beauty of the world — even if the world around them, shared and experienced, does not actually seem very beautiful.

Miloš Kratochvíl (*University of West Bohemia*):

Nicolai Hartmann in the Philosophy of Jan Patočka

In the texts about Jan Patočka, it is a commonly mentioned fact that in 1932 he attended Hartmann's seminar on Aristotle in Berlin. But what role did Hartmann's philosophy play in shaping Patočka's thinking? I will try to answer this question by following Patočka's explicit mentions and references to Hartmann's work. With the only exception of a short text written on the occasion of Hartmann's 60th birthday summarizing and evaluating his philosophy, Patočka did not deal with Hartmann in any systematic way. Nevertheless, from the mentions and references it is possible to reconstruct not only how Patočka perceived Hartmann, but especially how he used his insights in his own philosophical work.

Therefore, I will try to sort Patočka's mentions of Hartmann into three thematic group. The first one relates to the changes that Patočka perceived in the development of ontology, specifically the shift from idealism to realism. The second one concerns the ontological categories of space, time, and especially movement, which is closely connected with human existence. And this is precisely what the third group of mentions and references subsequently concerns. In the most general sense,

they deal with anthropological issues. This includes not only anthropological considerations about the human nature, but also topics such as consciousness, knowledge and moral values.

If we do not embark on interpretative adventures and if we give up looking for places in Patočka's texts where Hartmann is not mentioned but where he only could have inspired Patočka, and if we stick to the narrow but more solid path of textual evidence instead, we will come to the conclusion that Hartmann's influence on Patočka was not decisive in any of the three mentioned groups. The more modest formulation that Patočka occasionally helped himself with Hartmann seems to be more adequate.

Ricardo Valenti (*Ca' Foscari, University Paris I Panthéon-Sorbonne*)

Lebendige Gegenwart. Nicolai Hartmann's Crypto-Phenomenology of Science and the Pedagogical Pursuit of Meaning

In *Das Problem des geistigen Seins. Untersuchungen zur Grundlegung der Geschichtsphilosophie und der Geisteswissenschaften*, which was initially published in 1933, Nicolai Hartmann conducts a comprehensive examination of the historical and spiritual evolution of the meaning ascribed to human constructs, their potential for attaining objectivity and *objectification*, and their continuous transmission across successive generations of individuals. Among the various constructs, particularly within the domains of artistic and literary endeavors, including architectural pursuits, the one associated with *scientific*, and so *technical*, *diachronic*, and *sociogenetic* undertakings is arguably the most compelling. During the very same period when Husserl was engaged in work on *The Crisis*, and Fink was participating in discussions with him regarding some of the most intricate issues presented in the *Cartesian Meditations*, Hartmann also scrutinized the potentialities and limitations of scientific collaboration on an intersubjective, transcendental, and, above all, *intergenerational* basis. Furthermore, in Hartmann's work, we find a description – albeit not solely nor primarily from a phenomenological perspective – of the significance of *sedimentation*, the intuitive present, and its possible preservation in the expanded present of legitimate retention. It is therefore reasonable to posit that, during the same years as Husserl and Fink, the status of science and the “living” solidity of its somehow present foundations or *stratifications* were equally perceived by Hartmann.

In this text, indeed, Hartmann discusses the *Hineinragen* of past practices, their extension, and potential preservation. The latter is never a private initiative but a *collective and historically perceived task*, with respect to which individual members of each generation must gradually assume responsibility, in order to prevent the sense from objectifying itself and losing intuitiveness or vitality. Objectivity is handed down, survives its bearer, and is reconstituted by another capable of assuming its meaning from time to time. Generatively, lives follow one another, but the meaning persists indefinitely. Primarily through an examination of the most compelling excerpts from *Das Problem des geistigen Seins*, my presentation centers on the most significant aspects of scientific *Bildung* as articulated by Hartmann. It emphasizes both the *material* conditions that enable the human spirit to develop and sustain itself over time, as well as the *ethical* and *moral* imperatives he presents in these passages, which remain profoundly relevant today. At a time when the influence of artificial intelligence and its powers are likely to cloud not only our faculties but also the appeal to our factual responsibilities, Hartmann's arguments resonate with increasing relevance, given that he wrote during a historical period in which Germany was on the cusp of facing its darkest and most meaningless era. For this reason, as already mentioned, I consider it important to recall also the reflections of Husserl and Fink in this regard, and if necessary, promote a *synoptic reading* that can show the elements of continuity of the two productions.

Discussion Panel: ***Hartmann and Environmental Philosophy***

Panelists: Keith Peterson, Ana Mateos Calvo, Jordi Claramonte

Moderator: Joanna Glinkowska

Questions:

What do you understand by environmental philosophy? Could you list those elements of Hartmann's project which you find the most relevant for the matters of your concern?

How is possible to integrate Nicolai Hartmann's modal thinking and his distinctions on inorganic and organic levels of reality into environmental philosophy?

Which environmental thinkers do you think could benefit from Nicolai Hartmann's philosophy?
How could you relate his philosophy to current trends in environmental philosophy?