

## The Ontology of Processual Being: Nicolai Hartmann's Interpretation of the Hegelian Dialectical Process

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**> Abstract** • In this commentary I maintain that in order to improve the dialectical approaches of cognition by using the Hegelian concept of the dialectical process it is necessary to take into account Hartmann's ontology of processual being.

### The necessity of improving the dialectical approaches of cognition by the tradition of German philosophy

« 1 » I totally agree with the statement in Nicolas Zaslowski's target article that the elaboration of dialectical approaches of cognition is the best way to avoid the theoretical trap of all extreme standpoints (like reductionism and antireductionism) in contemporary cognitive science and philosophy of mind. Indeed, the need for such approaches has already been noticed but, as the author convincingly argues, in current cognitive science and philosophy of mind there is still no clearly defined concept of the dialectical process. One has to agree, as well, that in order to change this situation a deep analysis of Hegel's philosophy is required. Hegel, creator of the modern notion of dialectics, is still rarely mentioned in contemporary discussion on mind and cognition. But – and this is not a criticism of the target article but rather an addition – this problem also concerns the whole tradition of the German philosophy in which the Hegelian dialectical approach to cognition was creatively developed (like Marburgian neo-Kantianism and especially Nicolai Hartmann's philosophy). In order to use the Hegelian understanding of the dialectical process to describe neuro-cognitive processes, we cannot ignore this tradition.

### Hartmann's ontology of processual being

« 2 » At the beginning of the 20th century Hartmann, reconciling Hegel's philosophy, Marburgian neo-Kantian philosophy of science and phenomenological approaches, created the pluralistic, dynamical and relational ontology of processual being, which can be used to explain...

“continuity between natural, social, and cultural world [...] through a dialectical expansion from individuals to institutions by an ongoing 'back-and-forth' externalization and internalization process”

as Zaslowski writes in §54. He was the first to use Hegel's mostly speculative analysis to systematize the results of the empirical sciences.

« 3 » Hartmann describes empirical forms of Hegelian *Aufhebung*. He shows and ontologically explains the inseparability of processes of being and cognition (Hartmann 1921). He also criticizes all extreme positions (all “isms”), and rejects both monism and Cartesian dualism in favor of his ontology (Hartmann 1935, 1953, 1964). The importance of his analysis of the dialectical relationship between the personal spirit (individual subject) and the objective spirit (culture, society) (Hartmann 1949), in which he uses the Hegelian conceptual framework to describe concrete empirical processes, cannot be overestimated. He also redefines classical modal notions like possibility, actuality and necessity (and their opposites: impossibility, nonactuality, contingency) in the context of the ontology of processual being (Hartmann 1938).

« 4 » Hartmann's processual and relational ontology can also be explored in the constructivist approaches because it is situated beyond the metaphysical opposition of realism and idealism (Hartmann 1958; Peterson 2012). In reference to Kant's critical philosophy, Hartmann creates the new critical concept of “reality” or “real being” (Hartmann 1953: 23–31). “Real being” means simply “temporal and processual being” and is opposed to “ideal being” which means “eternal, unchanging being.” Moreover, Hartmann's ontology of spiritual being is relevant for constructivist approaches

because it shows that the spiritual being is a social construct.

« 5 » There are a lot of elements in Hartmann's ontology that can and should be explored by contemporary philosophy of mind and the cognitive sciences. Due to space limitations here, I will present just these two, which are the most useful for the subject matter of the dialectical process.

### Hartmann analyses of the dialectical relation between objective and personal spirit

« 6 » According to Hartmann (1949: 198), the discovery of the objective spirit was Hegel's greatest achievement, but “great explorers are seldom aware of what they have discovered”<sup>1</sup> (Hartmann 1949: 197, my translation). Dialectics is not a philosophical method but movement in the path of the spirit itself. It is the reason why, in order to capture the essence of the dialectical process, we should not study Hegel's *Science of Logic*, where he tries to explain it himself, but rather his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, where he grasps and describes the dialectical processes that occur in spiritual being (Hartmann 1957).

« 7 » Hartmann also argues that Hegel's descriptions of particular spiritual phenomena such as law, state, art, philosophy, and religion cannot be overestimated. By studying them, one can grasp the meaning of genuine dialectical processes. In his article *Hegel und das Problem der Realdialektik* Hartmann writes:

“Dialectics is clearly rooted in the philosophy of the spirit (mind). Here it grows out of the relationship to the object, indeed from its own objective structure. One has to look at this area if one wants to understand it. Here it has achievements that have nothing to do with the metaphysical assumptions of rational idealism.” (Hartmann 1957: 324, my translation)<sup>2</sup>

1 | “Die großen Entdecker wissen es selten, was sie entdecken.”

2 | “Die Dialektik wurzelt eindeutig in der Geistesphilosophie. Hier wächst sie aus dem Verhältnis zum Gegenstande, ja aus seiner eigenen objektiven Struktur heraus. Auf dieses Gebiet muß man hinblicken, wenn man ihr gerecht werden will. Hier hat sie Errungenschaften aufzuweisen,

« 8 » However, in his philosophy of objective spirit, Hegel made one serious mistake. He claimed that objective spirit has its own consciousness. But consciousness is a feature of a personal spirit and that is why the objective spirit is dialectically connected with the personal one. Hartmann's analyses of the relation between the subjective (personal) and objective spirit are crucial for understanding the essence of the dialectical process. This is a genuine dialectical relation, which means that the objective spirit (culture) and the personal spirit (concrete subject) exist only in an intimate relationship. On the one hand, each personal spirit is determined by the objective spirit (culture and society) in which it lives; on the other hand – contrary to Hegel's philosophy – the objective spirit – both in its content and in its existence – depends on the existence of personal spirits who create it and who are its bearers (Hartmann 1949). Hartmann's analyzes of this relation in *Das Problem des geistigen Seins* (ibid) find their confirmation in the field of sociology of knowledge (Berger & Luckmann 1966).

« 9 » The understanding of the relationship within the spiritual being helps to understand the ongoing dialectics of knowledge and the object of the knowledge that Hegel calls "experience." The object of the knowledge is part of the objective spirit, it is an object as described by current science. When the individual consciousness (personal spirit) makes cognitive progress, it changes in consequence the content of the object of knowledge (the content of the science as a part of the objective spirit). But the relation is mutual because the individual spirit always starts its cognition with the current content of the objective spirit in which it is living. (The cognitive progress always starts from some point and is strictly related to it.)

« 10 » In Marburgian neo-Kantianism there was the important dispute of how to understand the "fact of science" (*das Faktum der Wissenschaft*). Herman Cohen, the founder of the Marburgian school, defines the "fact of science" as the results of the process of cognition – the "state" of knowledge that is recognized as valid in some specific

die mit den metaphysischen Voraussetzungen des Vernunft-Idealismus nichts zu tun haben."

time and place (Cohen 1918). But for his student, Paul Natorp, the "fact of science" was the endless process of becoming – the process of scientific cognition, which he called the "unending *Fieri* of cultural creation" (*ewige Fieri des Kulturschaffens*) (Natorp 1912: 213). Hartmann shows that these seemingly contradictory two ways of understanding science, knowledge and culture can be reconciled in the dialectical unity of spiritual being, which is composed by three parts: *personal*, *objective* and *objectified spirit* (Hartmann 1949). The results of scientific cognition, which represents the current state of the knowledge, are objectivizing in *objectified spirit* (books, theories, systems). It is the "static" part of the spirit that is a necessary starting point for the further development of knowledge for every personal individual spirit. But since human cognition never ends, the objective spirit, just like a personal spirit, is always in the process of becoming. Both, the personal spirit and the objective spirit, are "living" spirits, while the objectified spirit is not "living." The objectified spirit is ontologically dependent on the existence of some specific personal and objective spirits. This does not mean that we can deny that in some way it is "existing" and ipso facto related to these other two.

### Hartmann's interpretation of the "Aufhebung"

« 11 » In Hartmann's ontology of multi-layer processual being we can also find the detailed explanation and exemplification of Hegelian "Aufhebung." The Hegelian notion "Aufhebung" – as Zaslowski rightly points out – combines two moments (or dimensions): "suppression" and "conservation." The main issue is then how to reconcile these two seemingly contradictory moments. To explain the process of "Aufhebung," which is the essence of all dialectic processes, Hartmann conducts his ontological analyses not at the separate-layers level but at the categories level. The distinction between fundamental and special categories (Hartmann 1953: 62–72, 1964: 157–374), as well as Hartmann's categorial laws (Hartmann 1953: 75–76, 1964: 375–522), make it possible to combine pluralism of the world with its unity and to avoid falling into the trap of the monism-pluralism dichotomy.

« 12 » However, what seems very important is that in Hartmann's ontology one finds a distinction that can be understood as the distinction of two types of "Aufhebung." Let me briefly present Hartmann's ontological framework to explain this distinction. There are four levels (layers, strata) of being in Hartmann's ontology (listing from the lowest to the highest): the inanimate, the biological (organic), the psychological and the spiritual. The order of these layers (strata) has two meanings: first of all, it presents the succession in which they appeared in the process of evolution, secondly, it presents the system of categorial relations between them. On the one hand, the existence of the layer that appeared later (the higher one) depends on the existence of the layer that appeared first (the lower one) but not vice versa. For example, without inanimate being there would be no organic being, but inanimate being can exist without any organic being. On the other hand, the matter (the being so, *Sosein*) of the higher layer is not reduced to the lower one. In other words, we are not able to completely understand and explain the higher layer by referring to the laws and categories discovered at the lower layer. For example, we cannot reduce organic being to inanimate being, because in each subsequent higher layer there is always some categorial novelty. In each higher layer the lower one is "aufgehoben": part of its content is preserved and part is rejected. These rules are expressed in two categorial principles – the principle of stratification (*Grundsatz der Schichtung*), which is afterwards specified in the laws of the categorial stratification (*Gesetze der kategorialen Schichtung*), and the principle of dependence (*Grundsatz der Dependenz*), which is specified in the laws of the categorial dependence (*Gesetze der kategorialen Dependenz*).<sup>3</sup> The principle of stratification says:

“Categories of the lower layers are largely contained in the higher layers, but not conversely.” (Hartmann 1964: 381, my translation)<sup>4</sup>

3| More details on categorial rights see Hartmann (1964: 375–253, 1953: 84–98).

4| "Kategorien der niederen Schichten sind weitgehend in den höheren Schichten enthalten, aber nicht umgekehrt diese in jenen."

« 13 » The principle of dependence says:

“There are only one-sided dependences: the dependence of the higher categories upon the lower; but this is only a partial dependence; it leaves much scope for the autonomy of the higher categories.” (Hartmann 1964: 381, my translation)<sup>5</sup>

« 14 » But, and this is an important point according to Hartmann, there are two possible relations between two subsequent layers, so we can say two types of “*Aufhebung*”: the relation of *super-formation* (*Überformung*) and the relation of *super-position* (*Überbauung*).<sup>6</sup> The relation of super-formation occurs only between the two lower layers of “real being”: the inanimate one and the organic one. The essence of this relation is that “forms” of the lower layer become the “matter” of the higher one, which has its own higher forms. Hartmann describes this relation in detail:

“The living organism does not simply grow out of the inanimate being and its laws, but contains both in itself; it is a spatial and corporal structure, it has weight and inertia like any other physical body, and its cells are made up of atoms. The living organism is certainly much more than all that but it does not get rid of it, does not leave it behind. It preserves it, merely ‘super-forms’ (*überformt*) it and makes of these elements something higher. This relation of super-formation shows clearly where the autonomy of the higher structure lies and how the higher structure retains the specificity of the lower elements to which the higher form is applied. The laws, and the categories of the physical being retain their validity, they are the same in the living organism, and they cannot be canceled even by the novelty of the super-formation, because they are even stronger thanks to it. Thus the autonomy of the living organism is a very limited one.” (Hartmann 1949: 67, my translation)<sup>7</sup>

5| “Abhängigkeit besteht nur einseitig als die der höheren Kategorien von den niederen; aber sie ist bloß partiale Abhängigkeit, sie läßt der Eigenständigkeit der höheren Kategorien weiten Spielraum.”

6| I use Roberto Poli’s translation of Hartmann’s terms “*Überformung*” and “*Überbauung*” (Poli 2011: 21).

7| “Der Organismus geht zwar im Materiel- len und seiner Gesetzlichkeit nicht auf, aber er

« 15 » But in the case of the higher layers, the relationship that connects them is different. Between organic being and psychological being as well as between psychological and spiritual being there occurs the relation of super-position. The relation of super-position is essentially different. Hartmann explains:

“What differentiates super-position from super-formation is that the forms of the lower layer do not become building blocks of higher formations, but the higher layer has its own, stricter form. In other words: not all of the lower categories come back in the higher layer, some of them stay behind; the return of the categories is curtailed.” (Hartmann 1949: 68, my translation)<sup>8</sup>

« 16 » The process of “*Aufhebung*” in the higher layers of being is much more complicated. There is still some kind of foundation. Psychic life is dependent on organic being and, indirectly, on the inanimate being. Spirit is dependent on the whole ladder of low strata. But this is another kind of dependence. One of the most important points made by Hartmann is that the two highest layers (the psychological being and the spiritual being) are neither

enthält beides doch in sich; er ist ein räumlich körperhaftes Gebilde, hat Schwere und Trägheit wie jeder andere physische Körper auch, seine Zellen bestehen aus Atomen. Der Organismus ist gewißt mehr als das alles, aber er streift es nicht ab, läßt es nicht hinter sich. Er behält es bei, er ‘überformt’ es nur, bildet daraus wie aus Elementen etwas Höheres. Dieses Überformungsverhältnis zeigt deutlich, wo seine Autonomie liegt, und wie sie an die Eigenart der niederen Elemente rückgebunden bleibt, denen sie die höhere Formung aufträgt. Die Gesetze, die Kategorien des Physischen bleiben in Kraft, sie ragen gleichsam in den Organismus hinein, können auch durch das Novum der Überformung nicht aufgehoben werden; denn sie sind ja die stärkeren. So ist die Autonomie des Organismus eine sehr begrenzte.”

8| “Wo Überbauung durch Überformung abgelöst ist, da werden die Formen der niederen Schicht nicht zu Bausteinen der höheren Formung, sondern diese hat ihre eigene, strengerer Form auch so aussprechen: Die niederen Kategorien dringen in der höheren Schicht nicht alle durch, sie bleiben zurück, ihre Wiederkehr bricht ab.”

spatial nor material. These two categories (*space* and *matter*) are not to be found in these layers of being. In consequence, questions such as “Where is the mind located?” or “Is the mind located in the brain” do not make any sense. The distinction between these two kinds of “*Aufhebung*” is important because:

“This is the reason why the methods developed in analogy to the study of physical laws could not be established in psychology.” (Hartmann 1949: 68, my translation)<sup>9</sup>

« 17 » In order to explore the relationship between any two ontological layers and thus to understand the process of “*Aufhebung*,” one has to develop detailed analyses of the categories that we use to describe the world. And – as Hartmann claims – because of the dialectical and processual character of our cognition, the ontology captured by sciences and philosophy is always temporary and has to be corrected according to the progress of our cognition.

« 18 » One can ask whether Hartmann’s distinction of these two modes of “*Aufhebung*”: super-formation and super-position, is still valid according to our current state of scientific knowledge or whether it should be corrected. Perhaps there are more types of “*Aufhebung*.” In any case there is an important lesson to be learned from Hartmann’s ontology if we want to adopt a Hegelian notion of the dialectical process. The unity of the world, including physical, organic, psychological and spiritual (cultural) being, does not necessarily mean the ontological superiority of any of these layers. There is a “continuity between [the] natural, social, and cultural world” but to capture it one needs to take into account the specificity of each of these layers. The object of the philosophy of mind and cognitive science is most complicated because the human mind is a four-layer being: we have to know not only the laws and categories of all of these four layers (and maybe there are even more layers) but also, and above all, the laws of dependence between the categories of different layers.

9| “Das ist der Grund, warum die nach Analogie physikalischer Gesetzforschung arbeitenden Methoden sich in der Psychologie nicht haben halten können.”

## Conclusion

« 19 » I agree with most of Zaslowski's conclusions, especially concerning the implications of the dialectical approach for such issues as a concept of subject, concept of the extended mind or extended model of cognition. Hegel's philosophy can be successfully explored for the conceptual improvement of the so-called "E-approaches" in cognitive sciences and philosophy of mind. The improvement of dialectical approaches could certainly also contribute in sociology and psychology.

« 20 » Since the ontology of *processual* or *relational* being has its philosophical history, the contemporary philosophy of cognitive and social sciences should try to build upon its achievements. Utilizing the Hegelian understanding of the dialectical process can be seen as great progress in the development of the relationship between empirical cognitive sciences and these achievements. The greatest value of the target article is therefore an indication of the necessity of including a recognition of classic German philosophy to improve dialectical approaches to cognition, which may and, I hope, will become the dominant paradigm in cognitive science in the near future.

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RECEIVED: 2 OCTOBER 2018

ACCEPTED: 10 NOVEMBER 2018

## From the Individual's Mind to the Spirit of Society: Deepening the Social Scope of the Neurodialectical Move

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**> Abstract** • By taking the proposal of a neurodialectical move seriously, I anticipate three interconnected questions that might appear if the program offered here is expanded to a social scope, namely regarding the specific dialectics the social could imply, the important distinction and articulation of two different aspects of the social, and the originarity of neurodialectics.

« 1 » The very interesting "neurodialectical move" the target article by Nicolas Zaslowski provides us with entails, as he stresses himself, implications for multiple scientific fields, including, and probably especially, the social sciences, with regard to its Hegelian foundations. Indeed, the dialectical process he carefully defines from Hegel's work in dialogue with Francisco Varela's neurophenomenology is designed to shed new light, not only on the conceptual relation between brain and mind within the well-known "mind-body" debate, but also on the potential relation between individuals and sociological "entities" (§55), which has been haunting sociology for more than a century. By taking his ambitious proposal seriously, my commentary aims at anticipating some issues that might appear if one wants to expand the neurodialectical approach "to a social scope" (§54).

« 2 » In order to foresee some of these issues, let us first briefly return to Hegel's example given in the article, about the transformations of a plant, to illustrate the dialectical processes, which designate the "fluid nature" or the "fluid braid" of every natural form, each one understood as a "moment of an organic unity" (Hegel §21). In the case of the plant, the dialectical process enables one to grasp the movement, which starts with the bud, then gives rise to a blossom, which will become a fruit whose seeds will