

ОНТОЛОГИЯ И ТЕОРИЯ ПОЗНАНИЯ ONTOLOGY AND EPISTEMOLOGY

<https://doi.org/10.21638/2226-5260-2019-8-1-33-51>

PHENOMENOLOGY AND BEING-IN-ITSELF IN HARTMANN'S ONTOLOGY: LAYING THE FOUNDATIONS

KEITH R. PETERSON

Associate Professor.

Colby College, Department of Philosophy.

04901–8840 Waterville, ME, USA.

E-mail: krpeters@colby.edu

Was Nicolai Hartmann a phenomenologist? Answering this question has become more important in the context of debates over new realisms in Continental philosophy. To answer it, the paper highlights five important points. First, Hartmann's own distinction between the phenomenological school of thought and phenomenological method must be preserved. He does not accept the sweeping humanistic opposition between the sciences and phenomenology, and yet (like the phenomenologists) he employs a method that aims to provide a description of phenomena following on a suspension of metaphysical commitments that is directed at their essential structures, with some important qualifications. Secondly, he rejects the phenomenological reduction because it identifies the natural attitude with a metaphysical standpoint and it advocates instead a 'naïve consciousness' free of metaphysical assumptions. Thirdly, his assessment of phenomenology is conditioned by his conception of cognition as a transcendent act. He finds that phenomenology fails to adequately account for the whole phenomenon of cognition, especially its characteristic grasp of something independent of the act. Fourthly, Hartmann grants the irreducibility of phenomena, but holds that they are characteristically unstable, referring to something beyond themselves and forcing us to decide whether what they show is genuine or not. There is thus no infallible intuition of phenomena. Finally, from an epistemological perspective, the concept being-in-itself is merely a counterpart to the concept of the phenomenon, which we do not need for the purposes of ontology. Based on this reassessment, it is concluded that Hartmann employs some form of the phenomenological method but cannot be identified as a phenomenologist.

Key words: Nicolai Hartmann, phenomenology, being-in-itself, cognition, phenomenological method, transcendent act, phenomenal transcendence, natural attitude, natural realism, metaphysics.

© KEITH R. PETERSON, 2019

ФЕНОМЕНОЛОГИЯ И БЫТИЕ-В-СЕБЕ В РАБОТЕ ГАРТМАНА «К ОСНОВОПОЛОЖЕНИЮ ОНТОЛОГИИ»

КИТ Р. ПЕТЕРСОН

Доцент.

Колби колледж, кафедра философии.

4550 Уотервилл, Мэн, США.

E-mail: krpeters@colby.edu

Был ли Гартман феноменологом? Ответ на этот вопрос стал еще более важным в контексте дебатов о новом реализме в континентальной философии. Для ответа на него в статье выделяется пять важных пунктов. Во-первых, нужно удерживать различие между феноменологической школой мысли и феноменологическим методом, проводимое самим Гартманом. Он не принимает беспочвенное гуманитарное противопоставление наук и феноменологии. Вместе с тем он (как и феноменологи) использует метод, имеющий своей целью вслед за приостановкой метафизических утверждений осуществить дескрипцию феноменов, которая направлена на их сущностную структуру, с некоторыми важными модификациями. Во-вторых, он отвергает феноменологическую редукцию, так как она отождествляет естественную установку с метафизической позицией, тем самым оправдывая ее в качестве «наивного сознания», свободного от метафизических допущений. В-третьих, его отношение к феноменологии обусловлено его концепцией познания как трансцендентного акта. Он считает, что адекватное объяснение феномена познания в его полноте феноменологии не удастся. В особенности это касается постижения чего-либо независимо от акта. В-четвертых, Гартман допускает нередуцируемость феноменов, но приходит при этом к выводу, что обычно они являются нестабильными, вынуждая нас принимать решение о том, является ли то, что они являют, подлинным или нет. Поэтому нет безошибочного созерцания феноменов. Наконец, глядя из эпистемологической перспективы, понятие бытия-в-себе — это всего лишь двойник понятия феномена, который является излишним для целей онтологии. Основываясь на такой новой оценке, сделан вывод, что Гартман использует определенную форму феноменологического метода, но не может быть опознан в качестве феноменолога.

Ключевые слова: Николай Гартман, феноменология, бытие-в-себе, познание, феноменологический метод, трансцендентный акт, феноменальная трансценденция, естественная установка, естественный реализм, метафизика.

1. INTRODUCTION

Phenomenology was always a partner in dialogue for Hartmann in his attempts to develop a critical ontology in the first half of the twentieth century. However, there has been quite a bit of unclarity surrounding the answer to the question “Was Nicolai Hartmann a phenomenologist?” For instance, early in his career there was serious disagreement about whether Hartmann should be considered part of the phenomenological movement or not. Christian Möckel points to the Berlin philosophical faculty

debate over whether to ‘call’ Hartmann, Heidegger, or Cassirer to Berlin in 1929, in which they were clearly under the impression that Hartmann appeared to be simply a follower of Husserl and Scheler with nothing original to say (Möckel, 2012, 110). In contrast, Husserl himself, in a letter to Cassirer a few years earlier, complained that in his groundbreaking *Basic Principles of the Metaphysics of Cognition* Hartmann “completely misunderstands phenomenology” and offers nothing but a “backwards dogmatic metaphysics” (Husserl, as cited in Möckel, 2012, 112). In his retrospective discussion of Hartmann’s relation to the phenomenological movement, Herbert Spiegelberg equivocally concludes that “Hartmann’s philosophy contains enough phenomenological ingredients to claim for him the status of an independent and highly unorthodox ally” (Spiegelberg, 1960, 387). This is hardly a definitive ruling on the question.

In short, confusion rather than clarity reigns on this question. But why bother with it in the first place? Has not the history of philosophy relegated Hartmann to the dustbin, while his contemporary Heidegger went on to become the guiding star of Continental thought? Although the question whether or not Hartmann was a phenomenologist may seem trivial, the philosophical stakes in it are in fact quite high in light of current developments in Continental thought. Hartmann himself noted that we see in the past only what our current horizon of problems allows us to see (Hartmann, 2017). Current debates surrounding so-called speculative realism, new realism, correlationism, and phenomenology allow us to see that Hartmann, as one of the few philosophical realists of his day, had to struggle to escape the clutches of correlationism in the form of phenomenological idealism and Neo-Kantianism. This puts us in a position to learn something from Hartmann about how to resist forms of anti-realism, and this is what makes the question “was Hartmann a phenomenologist?” in fact highly relevant. In terms of content, what is at stake in the question is whether the Kantian distinction between the ‘for us’ and the ‘in itself’ is a legitimate one. Hartmann makes some surprising claims about the concept of the phenomenon and of ‘being-in-itself’ which make situating his position relative to phenomenology complicated but instructive. This paper is by no means an exhaustive or definitive discussion of Hartmann’s relation to phenomenology, but offers a few insights that point in the direction of a more constructive answer to the question.

The first step forward is to insist on a distinction that Hartmann himself makes when he writes about phenomenology. Phenomenology can be considered both a ‘school of thought’ and a method for philosophy. He claims that phenomenology as a *method* is not only useful, it is a necessary component of a threefold methodology for philosophy that includes phenomenological description, aporetics, and theory, in that order. As a *school of thought*, however, phenomenology has inspired a bracing

turn to ‘the things themselves,’ but has also often brought along its own metaphysical claims that it cannot substantiate by its own means. As Spiegelberg noted, Hartmann himself never claimed to be part of phenomenological movement or school, but he does claim to utilize its method. Therefore, the discussion here is largely limited to what Hartmann understands by the method in light of a reconstructed definition. Beforehand, the broader issue of motivation for the phenomenological school should be briefly mentioned. Situating the phenomenological movement culturally allows us to resist the temptation to treat its method as insulated from the broader cultural currents in which it is embedded, and of which Hartmann and his contemporaries were a part. Following this the paper falls into roughly two halves that tackle these questions: Which aspects of phenomenological method does Hartmann adopt and which does he reject? How does Hartmann’s handling of phenomenology shape the way he discusses the distinction between the ‘for us’ and ‘in itself’? What does Hartmann mean by ‘being-in-itself,’ and is it necessary for anti-realist ontology?

2. PHENOMENOLOGY AND METAPHYSICS

In addition to assessing their philosophical merits, Hartmann interprets positivism, Neo-Kantianism, and phenomenology as reactions to a cultural crisis allegedly driven by a specific understanding of what the natural sciences are and do. In a recent book by Tom Sparrow, he also notes that phenomenology develops as a response to a crisis driven by the corrupting force of reductionist naturalism in the sciences. As Sparrow sums it up, for phenomenology broadly “[n]aturalism attempts to subject every domain of existence to the rigor of mathematical science, and ideally limit the sayable to the language of mathematics” (Sparrow, 2014, 7). The Cartesian *mathesis universalis* is the threat here, and phenomenology would be “the antidote, then, to the kind of naturalism that ‘alienates’ the immortal human spirit by reducing it to third-person natural knowledge” (Sparrow, 2014, 7). According to him, phenomenology is “basically an ideological reply to the worldview of technoscientific rationality and culture” (Sparrow, 2014, 9). Hartmann, similarly, saw positivism and Neo-Kantianism to be furthering the project of universal quantification and reduction, and since phenomenology regarded this as the core of science itself, it was perceived as a threat to its implicit humanism.

The critique of science [in phenomenology] takes off from the form of science emptied of content and reduced to a formalistic level. The critique sees through it, but mistakenly takes this to be the essence of science itself. In this way, it allows itself to be deceived by

a narrow momentary trend in the history of science. It can no longer see beyond its towering conceptual apparatus, does not see the relational contexts with their abundance of givenness, with the intuitively concrete; it only sees abstraction and construction. It regards science to be estranged from life, estranged from intuition... (Hartmann, 1965, 214–215)

Hartmann argues that because this definition of science is mistaken, however, the diagnosis of the cause of the cultural crisis is also wrong, and the hyperbolic reaction to it in the form of anti-realist phenomenology is thus unnecessary. This is not to say that there is no cultural crisis—it is just that he thinks it is wrong to believe that ‘science’ is its main cause. Thus, deflating an exaggerated conception of the scientific worldview is the first step toward more soberly assessing what phenomenology has to offer to philosophy.

In other words, recourse to an anti-realist ‘human experience of the world’ can only seem like a solution if every form of realism or naturalism is reductionist in the alleged way. This is the presupposition on which the overreaction is based. The staged opposition is between ‘phenomenology’ and ‘metaphysics,’ where metaphysics is a stand-in for reductionist naturalism. The ‘natural attitude’ of everyday life and the sciences is identified with this metaphysical standpoint, because in the natural attitude we assume (as do the sciences) the unproblematic existence of the objects of perception and cognition. On this construal, a ‘metaphysical’ conception of the world entails an uncritical commitment to the reality of objects. As Sparrow puts it, phenomenology “is a prohibition against metaphysics” (Sparrow, 2014, 15). “Phenomenology [...] is exclusively committed to investigating only those dimensions of human experience that take shape within the correlation between thought and being. [...] The method of phenomenology [...] eschews metaphysical speculation” (Sparrow, 2014, 2). From Hartmann’s perspective, this polemical contrast conflates two distinct things. On the one hand, there is the *phenomenon* of what he calls ‘natural realism,’ which is not a metaphysical standpoint or theory and is simply our baseline way of existing in the world; on the other, the ‘metaphysical standpoint’ of reductionist naturalism, espoused by that handful of theoretically oriented scientists and philosophers who happen to talk more loudly than all the others. This is the second important point that will allow us to assess Hartmann’s relation to phenomenology. The solution for phenomenology, in light of this opposition, is to suspend the natural attitude of everyday experience and of science, leading to a conception of a ‘naïve consciousness’ free of metaphysical assumptions. (I’ll explain Hartmann’s objections to such a thing below.) Hartmann believes that if we can distinguish between a natural realism of everyday life and the theoretical realism of metaphysical standpoints we can adopt a critical stance ‘this side’ of metaphysical idealism and realism. Hartmann thought that one of virtues of phenomenological method was precisely that it could be

conducted entirely ‘this side’ of that opposition. ‘Metaphysics’ is understood in a much broader way by Hartmann, and in his view the supposed ‘end of metaphysics’ allegedly ushered in by Kantianism and championed by everyone from positivists, Neo-Kantians, and phenomenologists to deconstructionists and post-moderns, has been greatly exaggerated. To think that you are beyond the reach of metaphysical assumptions and problems is precisely the worst stance to take in philosophy.

These initial moves are a powerful way of deflating phenomenological pretensions. The crisis to which phenomenology is a response is not the crisis phenomenology thinks it is; it assumes that all realisms are the same; it conflates the natural attitude with the metaphysics of science. Hartmann’s own response to positivism and reductionism is complex, and ultimately involves his articulation of a stratified ontology. For now, what matters is that Hartmann avoids going to either polemical extreme and finds the humanist motivation behind phenomenology and other forms of anti-realism to be laudable but unjustified. The question now is what does phenomenology as a method have to offer him.

3. COGNITION AND PHENOMENOLOGICAL METHOD

Phenomenology as method has to be distinguished from the characterization of phenomenology as a response to a humanist cultural crisis. Defining phenomenological method is actually not that easy. Some definitions cast the net too wide, making it difficult to determine what makes phenomenological method unique (Sparrow, 2014, 5–6). Others are too narrow. First of all, whether broad or narrow, all definitions of phenomenological method entail some claim about the method being ‘descriptive.’ It describes phenomena. What is entailed by this, as we see through its linkage to its second key feature, is that the description takes place free of metaphysical assumptions that might prejudice or bias the description. Hartmann himself agrees that phenomenological description must be ‘this side’ of what he calls metaphysical ‘standpoints.’ Sparrow isolates two essential features of the method that would likely be agreeable to most claiming to employ it. According to Sparrow, phenomenologists ensure that these descriptions are standpoint-free by performing the first indispensable step of the method: the phenomenological reduction or *epoché*. The ‘absolute minimum condition of phenomenology’ as a method is

a suspension of the natural attitude and its attendant realism; without a strict commitment to *phenomena as they appear to consciousness as the sole arbiter of truth*; and without refraining from committing to anything that does not give itself phenomenally to consciousness, phenomenology cannot maintain its methodological integrity. Either

phenomenology is a method whose basic principle includes a *suspension of metaphysical commitments* — precisely because *the metaphysical status of phenomena is not revealed by the phenomena themselves*, but is at best hinted at by their resistance or *apparent transcendence of human consciousness* — or it is simply a name applied to a style of doing philosophy that has no coherent method for establishing the legitimacy of its results. (Sparrow, 2014, 15, my emph.)

As already mentioned, Hartmann refuses to conjoin the ‘natural attitude’ and systematic ‘metaphysical commitments’ because he already finds an intellectualist prejudice here, as well as the identification of ‘realism in general’ with scientific reductionist materialism. An *epoché* of the natural attitude is thus not required (or even possible), although a critical stance ‘this side’ of ‘standpoints’ does have to be a key feature of the method. Three other aspects of this passage point to issues that Hartmann himself tackles in *Laying the Foundations*, and they bear directly on the question of the difference between the ‘in itself’ and the ‘for us.’ Two of these are the phenomenon of the object’s “*apparent transcendence of human consciousness*” and the fact that “*the metaphysical status of phenomena is not revealed by the phenomena themselves.*” I discuss these in the next section. I discuss Hartmann’s opinion on evidentiality, or the epistemic authority of intuition, below.

The second key feature of phenomenology according to Sparrow follows on the reduction. It is its attention to the ‘transcendental.’

[F]or a philosophical description, study, or conclusion to count as phenomenological — that is, to mark it as something other than everyday description, empirical study, or speculative metaphysics — that description must take place from within some form of methodological reduction that shifts the focus of description to the transcendental, or at least quasi-transcendental, level. (Sparrow, 2014, 14)

He continues to argue that “[w]ithout at least some attention to the transcendental [...] it becomes nearly impossible to see the philosophical value or understand the institutional influence of phenomenological description” (Sparrow, 2014, 15). Hartmann would accept this, I believe, provided we redefine the ‘transcendental.’ The idealist phenomenological conception of what is transcendental follows the Kantian ‘dogmatic prejudice’ that the conditions of experience must reside in the subject itself. But this is just one interpretation 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” (A 158/B 197) (Kant, 1998, 283). In an early essay on Kant, Hartmann argued that this principle expresses a ‘restricted identity thesis.’ These conditions of experience are neither completely identical nor completely different. The supreme 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 conditions of experience not within the subject but within the wider reality of which both subject and object are parts. The partial identity between subject and object which conditions the possibility of (a priori) cognition 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. Thus, Hartmann does not use the term 'transcendentals' to refer to ontological categories or principles because they are not lodged in the minds of experiencers, but permeate the world of which they are a part.

These three features fairly define phenomenological method as Hartmann himself seems to have understood it. Phenomenology aims to provide a *description* of phenomena following on a *suspension* of metaphysical commitments that is directed at their *essential structures*. (We could add: by means of infallible essential intuition. This point would be rejected by someone like Heidegger.) This definition of phenomenology now has to be seen through the lens of Hartmann's own conception of cognition. This conception is the third ingredient to our response to the question about Hartmann and phenomenology.

As noted above, Hartmann simply does not accept the stigmatization of the 'natural attitude.' Hartmann would agree with Husserl that everyday life and science are oriented by the 'natural attitude' to the world, or what he calls the *intentio recta*, but he rejects the devaluation of it that phenomenology implies, as well as the claim that this attitude amounts to a metaphysical position. The natural attitude, or the attitude of 'natural realism,' is not a theory or standpoint complete with metaphysical commitments. It is a phenomenon in its own right.

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. (Hartmann, 1965, 49)

For Hartmann, the *intentio recta* that characterizes this orientation is to be contrasted with the reflective attitude of epistemology, logic, psychology, and phenomenology. This distinction is fundamental to his approach:

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. (Hartmann, 1965, 46)

Failure to make this distinction in philosophy risks committing basic errors that stem from the reflective attitude. For example, the ‘correlativist prejudice’ is an error stemming from the reflective attitude that consists in conceiving everything that exists as an ‘object’ for a ‘subject,’ thus misinterpreting cognitive limitations as ontological structures (Hartmann, 1965, 77–79). Another mistake lies in the phenomenological conception of ‘naïve consciousness’ that is imagined as the alternative to any metaphysical stance (including the natural attitude). “In terms of its inspiration, the return to such a consciousness of the world should be positively valued” (Hartmann, 1965, 215). However, as far as Hartmann is concerned, there is no such thing.

We believe that naïve consciousness is the authoritative standard of all givenness. We do not notice that we are not familiar with such a thing, however. [...] Naïve consciousness does not philosophize, and so does not reflect on itself, but philosophizing consciousness is not naïve. Thus, neither encompasses naïve consciousness; the former does not because it does not ask, the latter does not because it stands worlds apart from it and does not know it. Thus, we reconstruct naïve consciousness, and take the reconstruction to be the description of something immediately given. The description turns out to be necessarily false. (Hartmann, 1965, 216)

Therefore, while Hartmann can agree that phenomenological description should be free of dogmatic metaphysical standpoints, the natural realist orientation to the world is not one of them. As a consequence, he has no use for the ‘phenomenological’ reduction¹. The approach to phenomena should certainly exclude artificial

¹ Hartmann instead understands the reduction in terms of the ‘eidetic reduction,’ in which he sees philosophical value because it facilitates the description of (ideal) essential structures. Spiegelberg misconstrues Hartmann’s understanding of ‘reduction’ when he claims that Hartmann identifies “essential intuition with the phenomenological reduction, the latter being interpreted as the omission of the accidental from the essential” (Spiegelberg, 1960, 377). Husserl himself used ‘reduction’

theories, but to believe that we are capable of getting rid of all of our own assumptions in order to become a 'naïve consciousness' is itself naïve. It becomes a kind of "willful-uninformed philosophizing" (Hartmann, 1965, 216).

Another important feature of Hartmann's conception of cognition is that he regards it as a 'transcendent act.' "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" (Hartmann, 1965, 146). Cognition is one transcendent act among others, and is in fact embedded in a far-reaching network of affective acts in the life context. 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' (Hartmann, 1965, 148–149). This interpretation of cognition was directly opposed to Neo-Kantian conceptions that regarded the subject as the spontaneous source of all order and regularity in 'nature.' As Hartmann claims in the first line of the *Metaphysics of Cognition*, cognition is not a 'creation or production' of its objects, but a 'grasp' of something independent of it. When phenomenological conceptions of cognition fail to take the 'phenomenon' of transcendence built into the natural attitude seriously, they are also inadequate². Insofar as they embrace the 'principle of consciousness' (consciousness only knows directly its own products or correlates) and remain philosophies of 'immanence to consciousness,' they misinterpret the phenomenon of cognition. They only focus on half of the phenomenon. The Husserlian 'law of intentionality' is contrasted with Hartmann's 'law of transobjectivity,' which together describe the two sides of the phenomenon of cognition. The relation of intentionality exists between the act and the intentional object, where consciousness 'has' the 'object' or 'phenomenon' (but not necessarily what is 'in itself' beyond them); the relation of 'grasping' exists between the act and the being-in-itself that 'is' implicitly beyond the act. This distinction between the 'object' or 'phenomenon' and 'being-in-itself,' the 'for us' and the 'in itself,' is itself a product of the reflective stance of epistemology (and does not exist for the natural attitude). From this reflective perspective, it seems as if a great deal of significance should be

in multiple senses in the Britannica article of 1929 (Husserl, 1960, 120–121). Hartmann clearly has the eidetic reduction in mind when he writes that the method is "depicted by Husserl in his *Ideas*: as 'putting into parenthesis,' disregarding the given individual case, reduction, 'bringing in front of the brackets,' etc." (Hartmann, 1965, 52).

² In words that Hartmann himself might very well have used, Sparrow claims that phenomenology reduces "the reality of being, by rendering being dependent on human consciousness. It empties being of real transcendence" (Hartmann, 2014, 17).

attributed to 'being-in-itself.' One of Hartmann's greatest achievements has been to show that it is not something about which we need to make much of a fuss. I'll explain why in the next two sections.

A final theme emerges from his definition of cognition. There is no such thing as infallible cognition. Hartmann does not think that intuition has the indisputable epistemic authority that most phenomenological authors take it to have. Almost as if in direct response to Husserl's 'principle of principles' ("direct intuition is the origin of knowledge and to be respected as its own authority," (Sparrow, 2014, 15; Husserl, 1982, § 24)), Hartmann says that

[t]here is a widespread view that in cognition of the ideal [i.e., essential structures] there is no possibility of deception. [...] Again and again we think that we are dealing only with an inner, intentional object, and deception, error, and misconstrual are not even possible regarding it. (Hartmann, 1965, 273)

Intuition too is a kind of cognition, and so it is also a transcendent act that originally aims at something transobjective. "Intuition is only cognition when it does not produce something, but 'grasps' something" (Hartmann, 1965, 273). As such, it can also be wrong about what it intuits, but its shortcomings in isolated cases can be rectified when placed in a wider context. Intuition

can incorporate individual components of cognition into the context of the whole, by which the sources of error in single intuitions are rectified. This takes place automatically everywhere scientific methods are underway. Science is interconnection, incorporation, comprehensive vision. An at least relative criterion of evidence results from the synthesis of stigmatic and conspective intuition — comparable to the criterion of cognition of the real in the synthesis of *a priori* and *a posteriori* elements. In both, it is not an absolute criterion; but such a thing is not available to humankind in any case. (Hartmann, 1965, 273)

Despite its lack of a criterion of evidentiality, Hartmann still praises phenomenology for providing a new kind of access to ideal essential structures. But he rejects the assumption that these structures only belong to consciousness or to a transcendental subjectivity. They have ideal being, that is, they exist in their own atemporal, nonspatial, nonindividual way. Hartmann is closer to the realist Munich circle phenomenologists in his understanding of ideal being here. 'Conspective' intuition also implies cognitive progress in duration at least for the individual, if not for the collective as well.

In a concluding statement on the topic of phenomenology, Hartmann says that "where phenomenology is a preparatory method, it performs outstanding and indispensable service." However,

[w]here it encompasses the whole of philosophy as such, it relinquishes scientific culture and a larger comprehensive view of things, instead making a new appeal to healthy human understanding — as if the latter did not first have to learn to use its “understanding” — becoming a kind of willfully uninformed philosophizing. The consequence is an uncritical faith in evidence and allegedly infallible certainty, the sacrifice of criteria worked out through centuries-long struggle, the general destruction of philosophical achievements, and the disappearance of the problem of cognition that becomes palpable in these achievements. (Hartmann, 1965, 216)

These points should explain the sense in which phenomenology is a viable method for Hartmann, as well as its limitations. They can be supplemented by further analysis of Hartmann’s definition of the ‘phenomenon’ itself, as well as of his peculiar concept of ‘phenomenal transcendence.’ This latter addresses the question of the distinction between the ‘for us’ and the ‘in itself.’

4. PHENOMENA AND PHENOMENAL TRANCENDECE

To Hartmann, cognition is a ‘transcendent act’ that reaches beyond itself to something ‘transobjective’ existing independently of thought. This aspect of the phenomenon of cognition is often neglected in positions that adopt the reflective attitude from the start. The concepts ‘object,’ ‘representation,’ and ‘phenomenon’ necessarily entail a relation to the subject. Hartmann argues that it is impossible to use the term ‘phenomenon’ as a substitute for ‘what is’ because it implies the existence of a subject to whom it appears, i.e., it is a product of the reflective attitude. Phenomena, however, also seem to implicitly refer beyond themselves to something transphenomenal, just as objects refer to something transobjective. This ‘phenomenal transcendence’ is not eliminated through the cognitive fiat of excluding the ‘in itself.’ There is a dialectic of dependence and independence relative to the subject that has to be reconciled in our conception of the phenomenon. There is something both irreducible and unstable about phenomena as such. This is the fourth constituent orienting our response to the question about Hartmann and phenomenology.

A phenomenological definition of the phenomenon seems to imply “that a ‘self-showing’ (*φαίνεσθαι*) belongs to everything that is. The phenomena are then those which ‘show themselves.” (Hartmann, 1965, 72–73). There are two mistakes in this conception according to Hartmann. First, ‘that which is’ is just as indifferent to ‘showing itself’ as it is to being ‘objectified.’ Both are subject relative determinations. There may be something that is that does not show itself, and there is no reason to claim that it exists less because of this. Secondly, ‘phenomenon’ does not entail that something real shows itself, since “[t]here are also illusory phenomena, empty sem-

blances, which are not the appearance of anything.” Phenomena should be considered similar to ‘intentional objects’ for which “it is also not clear whether something corresponds to them or not.” We certainly cannot avoid phenomena since

[p]henomena are what is given and as such retain their irreducible significance. Givenness is always the first factor in philosophical investigation, but *only* the first. It is not the final factor, not the one which decides about what is true and untrue. [...] We have to show the ‘phenomenon’ to its appropriate place. It is irreplaceable there. Beyond that it leads us into error. (Hartmann, 1965, 79)

Object, representation, and phenomenon are epistemological concepts that imply the correlation between the subject and a cognitive counterpart that is necessarily dependent on the subject. From this perspective, there appears to be a distinction between what is dependent on a subject, i.e., objectified by it, and what is independent of it, i.e., the transobjective, transphenomenal, or being-in-itself. This is ostensibly what the cognitive act as a transcendent act aims at. Phenomenology (as Hartmann understands it) rules out the existence of anything beyond the correlation, but Hartmann thinks that this is a failure to describe the *phenomenon of cognition* adequately. If we push on the conception of the phenomenon itself we find that it overflows its own limits.

As ‘what is given,’ phenomena are indispensable for all investigation, and describing them should be free of metaphysical assumptions. Hartmann even claims that “theories struggle against phenomena in vain.” There are ‘primary phenomena’ (*Grundphänomene*), such as the phenomenon of cognition, that simply cannot be explained away. But phenomena themselves are equivocal. In *Laying the Foundations*, Hartmann presents what he calls ‘The Antinomy of Phenomenal Transcendence’³. The problem with phenomena is that although it is “the essence of a ‘phenomenon’ to have a verifiable factual character,” the “factuality of that which constitutes its content is not verifiable in it.” As Sparrow put it in the passage above, “the metaphysical status of phenomena is not revealed by the phenomena themselves” in their “apparent transcendence of human consciousness.” Hartmann explains that “the phenomenon of the daily movement of the Sun in the sky from east to west is given and always verifiable, but whether the sun really executes such a movement in the cosmos is not verifiable

³ The whole discussion of ‘phenomenal transcendence’ may be a response to Husserl’s discussion of “immanent transcendence” in *Ideas*, §§ 44–46 (Husserl, 1982). Husserl places the emphasis on the immanence of experience, perception, and being, and Hartmann sees in this no real reference to the transcendent at all. Such an account keeps us from seeing that the “phenomenon of cognition” itself has metaphysical, i.e., transcendent, aspects that can be phenomenologically described (Möckel, 2012, 120).

with reference only to the phenomenon” (Hartmann, 1965, 152). Put in a general formulation, this means that “a phenomenon A does not as such signify the being of A. It could be that the being of B (i.e., something completely different) is behind it.” In the example, “instead of a movement of the Sun, a movement of the Earth could be behind the phenomenon. [...] In phenomenon A, it is never evident whether A also exists in itself, that is, whether the phenomenon itself is the appearance of A or illusion” (Hartmann, 1965, 153). This already entails that we have moved beyond the notion of infallible intuition.

This conundrum is then reflexively applied to the case of cognition itself. We can verify that in the *phenomenon* of cognition there is an appearance of being-in-itself, it seems to point beyond itself to something in itself. Does this phenomenon of transcendent cognition prove the existence of an in itself implied by the act? No, and we seem to be faced with a genuine ‘antinomy’ here, or a kind of contradiction. In other words, the very *content* of the ‘phenomenon of cognition’ is to grasp something in itself, and so “[i]ts content contradicts the essence of being a ‘phenomenon’” (Hartmann, 1965, 152). In other words, “the phenomenon of cognition is of a sort that overshoots its own phenomenal character. This overshoot constitutes its ‘phenomenal transcendence’” (Hartmann, 1965, 152)⁴. We might think that “the phenomenon of being-in-itself of course indicates that being-in-itself actually exists,” and that it might be ‘verifiable’ in the phenomenon of being-in-itself. But this cannot be the case. “The phenomenon remains phenomenon, even if it is precisely a phenomenon of being-in-itself.” This is because “[i]t belongs to the nature of the phenomenon in general that it ‘transcends’ itself, allows its content to appear as something transphenomenal. But if all phenomena fundamentally point beyond themselves, then the phenomenon of being-in-itself is not at all exceptional.” (Hartmann, 1965, 154). Phenomena as such, therefore, ‘possess an apparent instability.’

Phenomena as such are unstable. They require consciousness to decide whether they are really existent or mere appearance. We cannot deny them, and yet neither can we just be satisfied with them. This is the case in life, even more so regarding scientific work, and definitely the case in relation to the fundamental questions of philosophy. The genuine self-transcendence of phenomena consists in this kind of demand, this imposition on consciousness. This is a result of the instability of our consciousness of phenomena, is common

⁴ Sparrow notes that “phenomenology is replete with accounts of the excesses of being (I am thinking here of Marion’s ‘saturated phenomenon’ and Levinas’s wholly Other, as well as Merleau-Ponty’s claim about the impossibility of bracketing the world), but we must ask if these excesses are genuine evidence of a reality beyond consciousness or merely an excess of consciousness, an internal or intentional excess.” He concludes that they “are always internal to intentionality, not evidence of the autonomous reality of what appears in the phenomena” (Sparrow, 2014, 17).

to all phenomena as such, and is peculiar to them. [...] And, it must be added, this forcing of the phenomenon does not compel us to accept one option or the other. No preliminary decision on behalf of being-in-itself is contained in it. This is at least the way it should be for a purely descriptive, clarified consciousness of phenomena. (Hartmann, 1965, 154)

The concept of ‘phenomenal transcendence’ deals with the question of how we know that some phenomenon is a phenomenon of something in itself. But Hartmann even recognizes that in his phenomenon of cognition (natural realism) this question cannot be settled simply by describing it. A decision still has to be made about it. ‘For us’ it seems to refer beyond itself to something real; is there something real in itself? Correlationism responds to this question by rendering it moot in advance through the suspension of metaphysical commitments. This move renders everything immanent to consciousness *a priori*, and regards the phenomenon Hartmann describes as an illusion⁵. This does not do away with the primary phenomenon of our experience of grasping something independent of our act of grasping. It recognizes a distinction between the ‘for us’ and the ‘in itself’ but claims that it has no ontological significance. But for Hartmann, the process of objectification, of problem consciousness, and of cognitive progress all indicate *that* something transcends consciousness, and it takes patient and disciplined investigation to determine just *what* the phenomena show. Receptive affective acts such as suffering from something that ‘befalls’ us reveal the ‘hardness of the real’ far more distinctly than cognition, and complement its testimony. From this reflective perspective, however, there is an expectation that phenomena are phenomena of ‘being-in-itself.’ The final piece of the puzzle is Hartmann’s claim that this is a misplaced expectation.

5. HARTMANN’S AUFHEBUNG OF BEING-IN-ITSELF: TRANSCENDENCE, INDEPENDENCE, INDIFFERENCE

While the notion of the thing in itself is often associated with realism, just how it is associated with it remains a troublesome question. Hartmann calls it the “genuine fundamental critical concept” (Hartmann, 2014, 54). Of the many ways in which Hartmann clarifies the concept, one includes discussion of the categories independence and dependence.

⁵ Meillassoux interprets the ‘for us’ and ‘in itself’ distinction that is always implied by correlationism in an interesting way. He claims that correlationists cannot explain the ‘facticity’ of the ‘for us’/‘in itself’ distinction, i.e., the fact that there is a correlation at all. For him, this logically entails the existence of a realm of absolute contingency (so-called Hyper-Chaos) that plays the role of ‘in itself’ in his work. (For a compact presentation of the argument in his 2006 *Après la Finitude*, see (Meillassoux, 2014)).

In *Laying the Foundations*, he claims that while ontology is initially neutral regarding the issue of idealism and realism, “we are compelled to choose between these alternatives (idealism and realism) by the question concerning being-in-itself. [...]It is not difficult to see that the choice must be for realism” (Hartmann, 1965, 140). In his discussion of being-in-itself, Hartmann makes a crucial distinction between “gnoseological and ontological being-in-itself.” (‘Gnoseology’ is his preferred term for epistemology.) This is the fifth key point in assessing Hartmann’s position on phenomenology. His analysis of the phenomenon of cognition showed that we do indeed distinguish between the way that objects are given to us and the things themselves, but we immediately run into the correlationist aporia: if we only know about the thing through its givenness to us or objectification by us (dependence on us), then how could we ever know what it is in itself (its independence of us), beyond its mode of being-given? This distinction between epistemological and ontological rests in turn on Hartmann’s distinction between *intentio recta* and *intentio obliqua*, or between the ‘natural attitude’ of everyday experience, sciences, and ontology, and the ‘reflective attitude’ of epistemology discussed above. Hartmann makes the case that the concept ‘being-in-itself’ is an artifact of the reflective epistemological stance that we have been conditioned to take at least since the Modern period. Being-in-itself is a ‘counter-concept’ to representation, appearance, phenomenon, or object, and is a product of the logic of the reflective stance. Ontologically speaking, however, the subject who knows, the object known, and their relation are all equally ‘real,’ and the process of cognition itself arises and passes away in time. (See the discussion of Hartmann’s interpretation of Kant’s ‘supreme principle’ in section 3 above.) Objects, phenomena, representations, etc., have their own kind of being too. “Therefore, that which was to be distinguished from ‘being-in-itself’ [i.e., the ‘given’] is itself recognized to be being-in-itself” (Hartmann, 1965, 140). Hartmann describes this argument as a form of *Aufhebung* that results in a reversion from a reflective stance to the natural attitude.

Seen from the subject’s point of view (according to the ‘principle of consciousness’), all being-in-itself is taken up into being-for-me (something standing across from me); seen from the perspective of ‘being *qua* being,’ all being-in-itself, *as well as* being-for-me, is taken up into “what is as such.” The ontological concept of being-in-itself may thus be described as a reversion of the ontological perspective from *intentio obliqua* to *intentio recta*. (Hartmann, 1965, 141–42)

This does justice to the phenomenon of cognition, where “all cognition, even the most naïve, already possesses knowledge of its object’s being-in-itself, and already

understands it as a being existing independently of it” (Hartmann, 1965, 150)⁶. The apparent antinomy between the simultaneous dependence of the object on the subject and its independence from it is resolved this way:

[I]n the cognitive relation, being-in-itself is essential for the object, but being-in-itself is indifferent to being an object; it admits of it without requiring it. From this relation, we see that the independence of the object of cognition from the subject—thus, its being-in-itself — is not at all impacted by the dependence of being an object for a subject. In this lies the solution to the apparent antinomy. Dependence and independence in the object of cognition are not contradictory, because the first pertains only to its being an object, while the latter pertains to the being-in-itself in it. Objectified being is an extrinsic determination of being-in-itself. (Hartmann, 1965, 151)

Since object and phenomenon are both reflective concepts, this means that “phenomenal being” is also an extrinsic determination. With this conceptual shift, Hartmann carefully articulates a concept of the real that is not defined in terms of its relation or lack of relation to a subject or knower. Ontologically speaking, to claim that “being is independent of thought” is a merely negative characterization in relation to us, and in fact inaccurate and “inessential,” since everything that exists stands in relationships of interdependence⁷. It is a ‘crutch’ for epistemology. The interdependence between epistemological subject and object is just one type of relation among others. What is central for ontology is not independence of thought from being or dependence of being on thought, but the ‘indifference’ of ‘what is.’

Ontically, everything that there is, in any sense whatever, is being-in-itself. [...] We should not restrict ontological being-in-itself to the presence or absence of certain relations; *not even to the absence of a relation to the subject*. [...] [This conception] runs counter to the fundamental indifference of ‘being *qua* being.’ (Hartmann, 1965, 142)

⁶ Already in 1921, he helpfully explained that “[o]ntology takes a *middle way* between [natural realism and idealism]. Its thesis is this: there is a real existent outside of consciousness, outside the logical sphere and the limits of *ratio*; cognition of objects has a relation to this existent and reproduces a portion of it, no matter how inconceivable the possibility of this reproduction seems; but the cognitive image *is not congruent with the existent*, it is neither complete (adequate) nor similar to the existent. Natural realism is justified in its bare thesis of reality, since the real lies in the object-oriented direction of natural cognition; but it is unjustified in its thesis of [the immediate] adequacy [of this knowledge]. The speculative standpoints are justified in their rejection of the latter, but unjustified in their extrusion of the real from the object-orientation. Ontology combines the justified aspects of both. It preserves the reality-thesis of the natural world image, but cancels the thesis of adequacy” (Hartmann, 1949, 188).

⁷ “Everything existing stands in permanent interdependencies. The whole concept of the ‘independent’ is only a limiting case” (Hartmann, 1965, 141).

The real is fundamentally *indifferent* to being known, and should not be defined in terms of its relation or lack thereof to a subject. Defining the real in terms of 'independence from the subject' thus appears to be a form of residual anthropocentrism derived from the epistemological standpoint.

In conjunction with the reconception of the dualism between receptivity and spontaneity in his conception of cognition, this assessment of dependence and independence in 'being-in-itself' gives us a way of situating Hartmann relative to the current tensions between phenomenological and realist writers. While correlationism and constructivisms emphasize the independence and spontaneity of the subject, Hartmann emphasizes the receptivity and dependence of the human on a world not made for it. Entities are not dependent for their existence on subjects, even if 'objects' and 'phenomena' in some sense are. In the end, things are neither essentially independent of nor dependent on us, they are simply 'indifferent.' The reflective distinction between the 'for us' and the 'in itself' that seems so pressing for epistemology is an artifact of an artificial stance that ontology need not adopt. Hartmann's *Aufhebung* of epistemological being-in-itself, his redefinition of the real beyond dependence and independence, and his understanding of transcendent acts as originally in contact with something other than thought, provide helpful resources as we (re)enter this turn of the century trend toward realist ontology.

6. CONCLUSION

I hope this paper has shed some light on the long-standing question whether Hartmann should count as a phenomenologist, and why this matters in the context of new realisms. To answer it, we had to consider five important points. First, Hartmann himself makes a distinction between the phenomenological school of thought and phenomenological method. He defuses the tension between the (metaphysical) sciences and (phenomenological) humanism in his assessment of the phenomenological movement, which clearly places him outside of the school. He employs a method that aims to provide a description of phenomena following on a suspension of metaphysical commitments that is directed at their essential structures, with some important qualifications. The second point is that he rejects the phenomenological reduction because it identifies the natural (realist) attitude with a metaphysical standpoint, and in turn subscribes to the possibility of achieving an artificial 'naïve consciousness' free of metaphysical assumptions. Both are mistaken. Thirdly, his assessment of phenomenology is conditioned by his conception of cognition as a transcendent act, along with the distinction between *intentio recta* and *obliqua*. He finds that phenomenolo-

gy fails to adequately account for the whole phenomenon of cognition, especially its characteristic grasp of something independent of the act. Fourthly, Hartmann grants that the givenness of phenomena is our primary mode of experience, but holds that phenomena are characteristically ‘unstable,’ implicitly referring to something beyond themselves, forcing us to decide whether what they show is genuine or not (phenomenal transcendence). There is thus no infallible intuition of phenomena, even of ideal structures. Finally, from an epistemological perspective, the concept ‘being-in-itself’ is a kind of ‘crutch’ and counterpart to the concept of the phenomenon, which for the purposes of ontology we do not need. Whether ‘that which is’ is given to us as phenomenon or objectified by us as object or not is entirely indifferent to what is. ‘What is’ cannot be ontologically defined in terms of its relativity to a subject. Unfortunately, the correlationist standpoint of phenomenology cannot avoid it.

I have offered a few insights that might lead us to a more definitive answer to the question about Hartmann’s relation to phenomenology. It remains to fill in this picture more fully. A more serious question follows: is Hartmann right about phenomenology? If so, what can we learn from him about overcoming anti-realism?

REFERENCES

- Hartmann, N. (1949). *Grundzüge einer Metaphysik der Erkenntnis*. Berlin: de Gruyter.
- Hartmann, N. (1965). *Zur Grundlegung der Ontologie*. Berlin: de Gruyter.
- Hartmann, N. (2014). Diesseits von Idealismus und Realismus. In G. Hartung & M. Wunsch (Eds.), *Nicolai Hartmann: Studien zur neuen Ontologie und Anthropologie* (15–64). Berlin: de Gruyter.
- Hartmann, N. (2017). The Megarian and the Aristotelian Concept of Possibility: A Contribution to the History of the Ontological Problem of Modality. *Axiomathes*, 27 (2), 209–223.
- Husserl, E. (1960). Phenomenology. In R. M. Chisholm (Ed.), *Realism and the Background of Phenomenology* (118–128). Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press.
- Husserl, E. (1982). *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy. First Book: General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff.
- Kant, I. (1998). *Critique of Pure Reason*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Meillassoux, Q. (2014). Time Without Becoming. In A. Longo (Ed.), *Time Without Becoming*. Middlesex: Mimesis International.
- Möckel, C. (2012). Nicolai Hartmann — ein Phänomenologe? Zu den Termini Phänomen und Phänomenologie. In G. Hartung, C. Strube & M. Wunsch (Eds.), *Von der Systemphilosophie zur systematischen Philosophie: Nicolai Hartmann* (105–127). Berlin: de Gruyter.
- Sparrow, T. (2014). *The End of Phenomenology: Metaphysics and the New Realism*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Spiegelberg, H. (1960). *The Phenomenological Movement: A Historical Introduction. Volume 1*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff.