

Expanding the Horizon, Reawakening the Heart: Reply to Eric Chelstrom

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Abstract This paper is a reply to Eric Chelstrom’s “Criticism of Cicovacki’s The Analysis of Wonder.” Chelstrom mostly critiques my reconstruction of the role of love and personality in Hartmann’s philosophy. I offer a defense of my interpretation by illuminating how Hartmann’s philosophical project differs from that of Kant. Although Hartmann does not sufficiently develop either his conception of love or his understanding of personality, I argue that both conceptions could be further elaborated and that they could serve as the ways to reintroduce Hartmann into the mainstream of the current philosophical discussion.

Keywords Hartmann · Personality · Reality · Love

Spirit unites, consciousness isolates.

—Nicolai Hartmann, *Das Problem des Geistiges Seins*.

Kant introduces two powerful metaphors that vividly characterize modernity’s approach to the issues regarding the role and place of humanity in the universe. The first of them is from the *Critique of Pure Reason* and speaks about a “land of truth” and an “ocean of illusion.” Kant describes this land as an island,

surrounded by a vast and stormy ocean, the native home of illusion, where many a fog-bank and many a swiftly melting iceberg give the deceptive appearance of farther shores, deluding the adventurous seafarer ever anew

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with empty hopes, and engaging him in enterprises which he can never abandon and yet is unable to carry to completion.¹

This land of truth is humanity's realm, the domain in which we are creators and legislators; yet it is nothing more than a knowable island in the ocean of an unknowable universe. This unknowable universe extends not only toward the ocean surrounding the island, but also upward, toward the sky. In Kant's memorable words, from the conclusion of the *Critique of Practical Reason*:

Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing wonder and awe, the oftener and the more steadily we reflect on them: the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me... The former view of a countless multitude of worlds annihilates, as it were, my importance as an animal creature, which must give back to the planet (a mere speck in the universe) the matter from which it came, the matter which is for a little time provided with vital force, we know not how. The latter, on the contrary, infinitely raises my worth as that of an intelligence by my personality, in which the moral law reveals a life independent of all animality and even of the whole world of sense – at least so far as it may be inferred from the final destination assigned to my existence by this law, a destination which is not restricted to the conditions and boundaries of life but reaches into the infinite.²

Kant's friends were so captivated by this metaphor that they had the words “the starry heavens above me, the moral law within me” inscribed on his gravestone. They were not the only ones so impressed. In essence, the major trend of modernity consists in following Kant in focusing our attention on our isolated pocket of existence and the inner processes within the island. Kant's second quote elaborates on Descartes' subjectivist turn and extends it beyond mere cognitive aspirations of a conscious subject. This quote is the culmination of Kant's intent to prove the primacy of practical over theoretical reason. Above and beyond our cognitive capacities, we are moral and social beings.

In my book, *The Analysis of Wonder: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Nicolai Hartmann*, I criticize these two orientations under the labels of “intellectualism” and “moralism.” Prompted by Eric Chelstrom's valuable critique, I will attempt to shed more light on why Hartmann is so opposed to these orientations, and modernity in general, by following a different path. Much of Chelstrom's critique is taken, so to say, from the security of the island that Kant describes and it wonders at Hartmann's conviction that our hiding on that island is both mistaken and unnecessary. Chelstrom addresses the issues of (1) a need to rediscover the real, (2) a negative stand toward post-modernism and existentialism, (3) the use of Hannah Arendt as a way of framing the discussion of Hartmann's thought, (4) the importance of loving attitude, and (5) Hartmann's theory of personality. Since, according to Chelstrom's admission, the last two criticisms are far more substantial,

¹ *Critique of Pure Reason*, A235-6/B294-5.

² *Critique of Practical Reason*, Ak 5:162–163.

I will focus on them. I hope that my comments on these two central issues will suffice to reconstruct my thoughts about the first three criticisms as well.

The word “world” usually means the human world. Sometimes, however, we understand it as referring to the entire universe. We have turned Kant’s island into a human world but, as Hartmann reminds us, this is not the universe. Far from it.

On that island, we have established ourselves as a dominant species and its rulers. We not only dominate over other creatures also inhabiting the island, but we have established a number of policies and laws governing the behavior of the people and regulating our political engagement. Each individual, for instance, has a unique name, unique fingerprints, and a unique identity number. Each individual is held responsible for his or her choices and behavior. All of this is neatly regulated. Although we normally use the terms “individual” and “person” interchangeably, Hartmann seems to create some confusion by insisting that they are not the same. For Hartmann, an individual is a quantitative category, while person is a qualitative one. “Individual” refers to something given, while “person” designates a task of realizing one’s potential, one’s “ideal ethos.” Thus, person is not a *factum* but a *desideratum*. It is something we (should) strive to become, even if we never succeed in fully realizing our ideal ethos. Most of us dedicate our lives to some other, more practically defined goal, related either to securing of our existence or the development of the gifts appreciated by our society.

Limited to our island and obsessed with the political and economic role each individual should play, we have developed a conception of human rights, which pertains to each one of us as a human being. The doctrine of human rights, which is the basis of our social law, is indeed an improvement over the time when our social rankings and roles were defined in terms of our property, race, or gender, rather than in terms of our humanity. But our common humanity is just one aspect of who we are. In addition to it, each one of us is a unique human being. We understand this concept to mean that we can live and dress in our own peculiar way, based on our individual preferences. Hartmann thinks that we thereby overlook something fundamentally important.

Hartmann maintains that real being consists of four distinguishable yet interrelated layers: the inorganic, the organic, the psychic, and the spiritual. Following Kant, we tend to ignore the fact that the island that we inhabit must exhibit the same ontological structure as the bottom of the ocean that we refuse to investigate. The roots of being are the same, whether we discuss our island or foggy banks and icebergs floating through the ocean. Kant is right to insist on the permanent limits of human cognition, but, according to Hartmann, he does not draw the line at the proper place. The delineating line should not be separating our island from the rest of real being, but should refer to the distinctions between the very roots of being and what is built on them. In Hartmann’s language, the basic categories of reality, and of our thought as well, are indefinable and will always remain so. We can, nevertheless, gain a sufficient understanding of the structural laws of real being in order to understand that the ontological organization of the island is the same as the ontological structure of the rest of real being.

Kant also does not pay enough attention to the spiritual layer of real being. It is not that he does not recognize what Hartmann calls the “objective spirit” and the

“objectified spirit,” but rather that he and most modern philosophers neglect the personal spirit. The concern about human rights covers the objective spirit, as it is objectified through our laws, customs, language, and other related institutions. The uniquely personal spirit escapes Kant’s attention, and he rarely uses the term “spirit” in his philosophical opus. One important reason for that is due to Kant’s “Copernican Revolution.” Following Descartes’ “cogito” argument and his subjectivist turn, Kant attempts to legitimize this turn by means of separating the empirical and what is acquired from experience (=a posteriori) from what precedes all experience in order to make it inter-personal, communicable, and objectified (=a priori). Whether Kant speaks about empirical or transcendental consciousness (with its a priori forms of intuition and the categorial concepts), Hartmann critiques him for staying at the psychic level rather than rising to the level of the spiritual.

In *The Problem of Spiritual Being*, Hartmann elaborates this distinction between the psychic and the spiritual in terms of the “ego-centric” and the “ec-centric” perspectives.³ The modern subject (in Descartes, Kant, and others) puts itself in the center of the world and orients this world to itself, in terms of its cognitive and practical interests and by means of its cognitive and non-cognitive tools. Spirit, according to Hartmann, no longer orients the world to itself but itself to the world. It does not position itself in the center of the world and does not force objects to conform to our interests and tools; it does not make objects be “for us.” Rather, it positions itself in such a way that enables the objects to be for themselves and to reveal themselves to the spirit that lets them appear and be what they are, regardless of our interests and tools. It is at the level of the spiritual that we genuinely engage with the real world.

The cornerstone of Kant’s philosophical edifice is his postulation of “pure reason” with its universal and a priori forms—be that theoretical or practical reason. Kant’s successors failed to be convinced that such alleged a priori forms are not pragmatically derived from experience, rather than be prior to and constitutive for it. This loss of faith in the universal (objectifying and moralizing) power of reason has had a momentous impact on our views on the nature and status of values. Kant does not use the term “values,” and whatever corresponds to values in his system in any foundational way would have to be reason-generated and a priori. Once the confidence in the Kantian program is undermined, we turn our attention away from the “metaphysics of morals” and toward the local customs and subjective experiences. Any search for a great unifying narrative about our legitimate place and role in reality is abandoned and the old pillars of our worldview deconstructed, with nothing to replace them. Nothing, that is, except for subjective impressions, existential anxieties, and a lingering feeling of spiritual disorientation. Once deemed our legitimate realm, Kant’s island of truth shrinks further into a subjective domain which in our age appears more virtual than real. The ambition of modernity to master the world, even if it is limited to one island, has found itself dispersed into the fog of post-modernity, far foggier than Kant’s “ocean of illusion.” Our post-modern “incredulity toward metanarratives” (Lyotard) and our existential fear of the real may be conducive toward our survival, as Chelstrom argues, but they

³ Hartmann, *Das Problem des geistiges Seins* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1962), 9b, pp. 110–111.

diminish our horizon and leave us disoriented both with respect to our identity and our legitimate aspirations and ideals.

Hartmann leads us in the opposite direction, toward the expansion of our horizon, but with an anti-subjectivist twist and without any ambition to become the masters of the world. Just as in his ontology, he shows the relevance of the stormy ocean (and real being in general), in his axiology he salvages the relevance of the starry sky—it becomes the “dwelling place” of ideal being (values included). Just as we get in touch with the objects of cognition through a transcendent (not transcendental) act, we similarly get in touch with values through a transcendent act—but an emotional, not a cognitive act.

Hartmann’s conception of the person is an attempt to show that we are more than socially programmed human beings, limited to the realms of politics, economy, and technology, as Arendt suggests. Hartmann’s conception expands our horizon by relating the living individual to the ideal realm of values. In Kant’s terminology, as persons, we are the citizens of the “two worlds.” The main function of the spirit is to connect these worlds by realizing the values from the starry sky in the realm of real being. For each one of us, with our own unique gifts and dispositions, there is a unique set of values—our “ideal ethos”—that we should try to realize as much as possible. In Hartmann’s words,

The greatness of personality is much more a purely inner greatness; it has scope in the most narrow sphere of life, for it is nothing else than uniqueness of commitment to values and, indirectly, uniqueness of the valuational perspectives with which a man permeates his sphere in life. Whoever is really a marked personality, carries his standards beyond all question in himself; in following them he is loyal to himself. He shows very definite and unmistakable sympathies and antipathies, for which he can give no other account than that which is to be found in their existence and their felt necessity. He sees the world, in a light of his own, as no one else sees it, in the light of his preferred values; and lives in accord with them.⁴

Developing one’s personality and trying to realize one’s ideal ethos does not mean climbing toward some imaginary summit. Quite the contrary, it consists in beholding the ideal ethos and living it up in all our experiences, of bringing it down to earth from the starry sky of values. As Hartmann clarifies it,

A person whose individual moral Idea is a power in him, actualizes it incidentally in all his dealings, no matter what he may be intentionally trying to bring about. He steadily builds, so to speak, out of his own distinctive moral Being, in so far as in all his strivings and dealings the intended situational values, besides being selected according to general moral standards, are also selected by the unique norms of his personal ethos.⁵

⁴ Hartmann, *Moral Values*, trans. Andreas A.M. Kinneging (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2003), p. 354 (*Ethik*, LVIIIf).

⁵ Hartmann, *Moral Values*, p. 42 (*Ethik*, XXVIIe).

Chelstrom is concerned with the relationship of personality and community, with whether Hartmann's conception of personality may be elitist, and what role love may play in the rediscovery of the world. We are now in a better position to address these concerns. It is not only that with the subjectivist turn of modernity our world shrinks, but our sense of ourselves diminishes as well. We are being reduced to a cognitively and morally oriented consciousness, while there is so much more to us, just as there is so much more to reality than our tiny island. Hartmann's conception of the person reconnects us with the starry sky of values, but it also plants us squarely into our community and the real world. In fact, Hartmann maintains that our impoverished conception of the self and the world makes us strangers to each other and blinds us to the real riches of the world. In Hartmann's words,

The tragedy of man is that of one who, sitting at a well-laden table, is hungry but who will not reach out his hand, because he does not see what is before him. For the real world is inexhaustible in abundance, actual life is saturated and overflows with values, and when we lay hold of it we find it replete with wonder and grandeur.⁶

Just as we have been arguing in the last two thousand years whether monism or dualism is a better metaphysical position, when in fact our acquaintance with real being demands a pluralistic account, so our discussions of the primacy of theoretical versus practical reason reduces us to a caricature of ourselves, for we are so much more than just a reason, be it theoretical or practical. Our contact with reality is grounded on our intuitive grasp and emotional responses. Our theoretical and practical concerns are secondary. They are what narrows down our contact with reality and our ability to approach reality as it is. They are what make us approach the world from an ego-centric point of view and what precludes our spontaneity and playfulness, our "disinterested interest" and spiritual interactions with that reality. It is we who, in our narrow-mindedness and a selfish approach, limit and deconstruct the world, and it is we who have to change our overall approach in order to let the world open up for us and enable us to develop our personality in it.

Hartmann's word for this engaging and transformative attitude is "love." Just as he does not fully develop his conception of the person (and personality), he does not clarify enough his conception of the loving attitude toward the world. It is at these two points—personality and love—where I as his interpreter try to capture the spirit of his philosophy and enable it to continue to grow. Both personality and love belong to the realm of the spiritual layer of reality, the one of which we are most suspicious in the Anglo-Saxon world. Without understanding that layer better, however, we continue to struggle with an impoverished conception of ourselves and the real world.

Since I already clarified the concept of the person a bit, let me add a few words about love and the loving attitude, before I conclude my reply to Chelstrom. Love is not part of the natural (animated) world. It also exists only in a rudimentary (or the lowest) form in the psychic world. When it does appear there, it is in the form of

⁶ Hartmann, *Moral Phenomena*, trans. Andreas A.M. Kinneging (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2002), p. 39 (*Ethik*, Einführung, sec. 5).

brotherly love, when we react with sympathy (com-passion) to the suffering of others. It does not matter who those others are, and the loving relationship here is that of “surface to surface.” Following Nietzsche’s lead, Hartmann pays far more attention to the “love of the remote” (*Fernstenliebe*), which is virtually neglected in the entire philosophical literature. Love of the remote deals with our grasp of the essential human potentials, and of our responsibility for creating the opportunities for those remote in space and time to live in aspiration of the highest and the best.

Hartmann claims that love, in all of its forms and manifestations, belongs to the highest moral values. Among different forms of love, he elevates “radiant virtue” (*Schenkende Tugend*) and personal love to a special pedestal. Hartmann’s discussion of these two forms of love belongs to the peaks of his philosophical opus. Their discussion also provides a clue for reaching toward the highest stages of human development and a renewed discovery of reality. These forms of love are ec-centric and spiritual. They connect, rather than separate. What Hartmann (again following Nietzsche) calls “radiant virtue” (and what I would call “radiating love”), is no elitist conception of love, contrary to Chelstrom’s concern. It is an attempt to show us, especially in our age of a “herd-mentality,” what a treasure a unique and developed personality is for all of us—all of us, that is, who are willing and capable of elevating ourselves to the spiritual level and experiencing it as such. Personal love may for Hartmann be the highest point of our reach. This is the way of connecting the deepest layers of one personality with the corresponding layers of another, through complete trust and surrender.

Perhaps Hartmann makes it difficult for us to see the full implication of his views on love by talking about love under the rubric of moral values. When we connect his discussion of love in his *Ethics*, *Aesthetics*, and *The Problem of Spiritual Being*, it is easier to see that for him love is primarily an attitude. That means that it is a way of relating, of opening oneself up, of trusting and surrendering, of playfulness and spontaneity, of an interplay and curious exploration, of wonder and awe. What matters for such an attitude is not primarily who or what is being loved (love as a noun), nor what specific actions are undertaken to show our love (love as a verb), but whether we approach our lives and everything that it presents to us with an open heart and mind (love as an adverb). This is the attitude of the reawakened heart that, according to Hartmann, is the only one that is capable of expanding our horizon and enabling us to rediscover reality, “in all of its imperfect glory.” Hartmann clarifies his position, by warning us of the dangers of the reverse attitude:

Ethical actuality is richer than all human phantasy, than dream and fiction. To live apathetically from moment to moment amid the abundance, is nothing short of sin. The narrowness of a man’s participating sense of value makes him poor. It is because of his prejudice, his blindness, that he does not see the abundance, in the midst of which he stands. The ethos of openness to all values is the tendency to do inward justice to life, to win from it its greatness. Its passion springs from reverence for the unbounded abundance of the things that are of worth, it is knowledge filled with gratitude; and, where knowledge fails, it is the presentiment that the values of existence are inexhaustible. Whoever lives in this attitude, by him every restriction of experience is

recognized as superficiality, dullness, barrenness, a waste of life and, when it degenerates into a pose, as an unworthy renunciation, a petty pessimism, a moral ingratitude.⁷

This is the attitude that can help us reestablish our positions in reality not as prisoners on an isolated island, but as citizens of the world, which very much involves the stormy ocean and the starry sky.

I am not certain that Hartmann himself would choose these thoughts as the most representative of his vast and underappreciated philosophical opus. I have selected them in the hope that they may provide the best way to reintroduce Hartmann into our philosophical discussion and cultural life. I am convinced that, in urging us to expand our horizons and reawaken our hearts, Hartmann offers our disoriented philosophy and our self-destructing civilization something that may lead us back to recovery and to flourish in the future.

⁷ Hartmann, *Moral Values*, p. 210 (*Ethik*, XLic).