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The ontological conditions of trust in Nicolai Hartmann's thinking

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1. *Introduction*

This paper discusses the issue of trust (*Vertrauen*) and trustworthiness (*Zuverlässigkeit*) in Nicolai Hartmann's ethical and ontological thinking. As we shall see, the focus of Hartmann's reflection on trust can be summarised as follows: the establishment and maintenance of a relationship of trust presupposes the permanence of all elements involved in it: trust (as a value in itself), the tangible goods that substantiate the relationship of trust (the keeping of one's word in a difficult period, for instance), the condition of the acquisition of the good (the situation, in a sense that shall be circumscribed later), the moral subject or person (for others to trust me, my personal identity must also be stable and firm), finally, the other persons. In short, for Hartmann one of the most relevant philosophical problems posed by intentional acts such as trust and commitment, and by moral qualities of persons and institution such as reliability and trustworthiness, is to understand the different ways in which the involved entities can and do last: their ontological modalities of permanence. Moreover, in the concrete moral life of a subject, the above-mentioned elements constitute an articulated and unitary structure that we will try to outline in a synthetic but exhaustive way.

Hartmann has discussed all the above-mentioned components of trust-based relationships and situations in various of his works. The approach of this paper is to follow the chronological sequence of those that are particularly relevant in this regard. I will start with *Ethics* (1926)[1] and then dis-

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[1]   N. Hartmann, *Ethik*, De Gruyter, Berlin 1926 (transl. coord. by A.A.M. Kinnegin, *Ethics*, Transaction Publishers, New Brunswick, New Jersey 2002-2004, 3 vols.).

cuss parts of *Das Problem des geistigen Seins* (1933)[2] and *Philosophie der Natur* (1950)[3]. This chosen pathway requires a shift in perspective because of the change in methodologies used by Hartmann himself. In *Ethics*, his approach is predominantly phenomenological. In explicit connection with Max Scheler's work *The Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Value* (1913-16)[4], Hartmann's focus is on the acts of a subject's concrete grasping of values as phenomenological essences – even if, as we will see, among the outcomes of this process there will be the subject's grasping not only of the independence of values, but also of their ontological collocation among the ideal entities. That is why I have qualified the approach of *Ethics* as *predominantly* phenomenological. Later on, Hartmann's views on the practical agent and axiological situations become neatly ontological. More precisely, emerging fully in his mature works are ontological constants of reality that explain and form the basis of the phenomenology of values proposed in his *Ethics*. The first of those constants consists, as we shall see, of the radical processuality and contingency of the ontological context in which the moral subject is embedded (the real being); the second, is the fact that even the moral subject is, in itself, a becoming and processual entity. Moral values, whose status as ideal entities is reaffirmed by Hartmann in every phase of his thinking, can provide meaning and orientation to the agent; but it is not for them to guarantee the continuity and ontological stability that is necessary for their realisation in the unceasingly becoming sphere of the real being.

2. *Trust and trustworthiness in Hartmann's Ethics*

2.1. *Hartmann's ontological-based material ethics of values*

In order to fully understand the following discussion on the issue of trust in Hartmann's work, it is appropriate to briefly outline his overall view of ontological reality. The fundamental strands of this view are relatively stable throughout his philosophical output (as anticipated in the introduction, they are also present also in the first phase where they must coexist, in a prob-

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[2]   N. Hartmann, *Das Problem des geistigen Seins*, De Gruyter, Berlin 1933.

[3]   N. Hartmann, *Philosophie der Natur. Abriss der speziellen Kategorienlehre*, De Gruyter, Berlin 1980[2].

[4]   M. Scheler, *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Values. A New Attempt Toward the Foundation of an Ethical personalism*, transl. by M.S. Frings and R.L. Funk, Northwestern University Press, Evanston (Ill) 1973.

lematic way, with the Schelerian phenomenological approach). The stability of this ontological framework will allow us to better understand the changes made on particular points (as we shall see, one of the most significant of these being the moral subject, i.e. the person).

The main division in Hartmann's ontology is between the real being on the one side, and, on the other, the ideal being. The first includes nature (inorganic matter, physico-chemical forces, living beings), the psychic sphere (the lived inner and/or bodily experience in human beings) and what Hartmann calls the "spiritual" world (the human collective world: culture, language, institutions, traditions, society). The second contains four main types of entities: logical and mathematical entities, essences (entities that Hartmann thinks of, in a way similar to Husserl, as the typological ideal core of lived experiences), aesthetic values, and ethical values. The real being is characterised by processuality and contingency, and is radically subjected to time and transience; the ideal one, instead, includes fixed and timeless entities whose existence is considered by Hartmann as in-itself, i.e. totally independent by their being grasped, or not, by human consciousness[5].

Hartmann's ontological thesis of the collocation of values in a realm of ideal, timeless entities is not contradictory to his approach in *Ethics*, which we have qualified above as being predominantly phenomenological. On the contrary, the very distance between moral values and the real world, and above all, the fact that only through man they can exert an effect on reality, make the phenomenological approach valuable[6]. The concrete ways in which human beings play their mediation role in given situations; how they grasp the nuances of their fellows' commitment to particular values; how they express a moral preference; all this requires great phenomenological attention to a wide range of what Hartmann, in *Ethics*, calls transcendental emotional acts («all acts which are related to the fullness of life and which grasp reality are at same time acts which grasp values and which select according to values»[7]). As Eugen Kelly summarises, it is true that «values are real but ideal. They exist in a realm similar to that of mathematical objects»; anyway, «it is the function of phenomenology to re-enact the acts of consciousness that intend the pure values, […] the kinds of acts of consciousness that typically intend them»[8].

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5   N. Hartmann, *Ethics I. The Ideal Self-Existence of Values*, vol. 1 of *Ethics*, cit., pp. 217-231.
6   N. Hartmann, *Ethics II. Moral Values*, vol. 2 of *Ethics*, cit., pp. 217, 229.
7   N. Hartmann, *Ethics I*, cit., p. 176.
8   Eugen Kelly, *Material Ethics of Value: Max Scheler and Nicolai Hartmann*, Springer, Dordrecht-Heidelberg-London-New York 2011, p. 79.

Leaning on Scheler, and sharing the same anti-formalistic intent, Hartmann stresses the *a priori* character of such feeling acts (their «emotional apriorism»[9]), which are «as little empirical as the categorical elements in the experience of things. […] There is a pure valutational a priori which directly, intuitively, in accordance with feeling, penetrates our practical consciousness»[10]. The resulting position is a peculiar, typically Hartmannian, variant of Scheler's material ethics of value: a kind of ethics that stresses the *a priori* character of moral life – because «values emanate neither from the things (or real relationships) nor from the percipient. No naturalism and no subjectivism attach to their form of Being»[11]), – but at the same time denies what Kant thought of as a necessary consequence of the transcendental character of ethical life: formalism. Values, writes Hartmann, «are not "formal" or empty structures, but possess contents; they are "materials", structures which constitute a specific quality of things, relations or persons according as they attach to them or are lacking»[12]. Here Hartmann uses the adjective "material" in the Schelerian sense, as a reference to the phenomenological concreteness and evidence of a multiplicity of different axiological qualities affecting things, human relations and personal decisions[13].

2.2. *Trust and trustworthiness as axiological "materials"*

In *Ethics*, the intertwining of Schelerian phenomenology and Hartmann's own ontological view of reality leads to a peculiar result. On the one hand, the philosopher underlines the spontaneity of the axiological experience of the "materials" of practical life; on the other, he distinguishes, in the very lived experience, the phenomenologically given "material" and its original

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[9]   N. Hartmann, *Ethics I*, cit., p. 176.

[10]   *Ivi*, p. 177; and, later, «man's sensing of values is the annunciation of their value in the discerning person […]. The apriority of the knowledge of them is no intellectual or reflective apriority, but is emotional, sensitive» (*ivi*, p. 185).

[11]   *Ibidem*.

[12]   *Ibidem*.

[13]   However, the proximity between Hartmannian ethics and the Schelerian approach is more apparent than real. This is attested first by Scheler's criticisms of Hartmann's thesis of the ideal self-existence of values. This thesis was, for Hartmann, the best way to found the apriorism of values and, consequently, the independence of ethics from empiricist, psychological and subjectivist moral approaches; for Scheler, it was a dangerous deviation from a correct phenomenological view in the direction of a dogmatic «ontologism» (see M. Scheler, "Preface to the First Edition", in *Formalism in Ethics*, cit., pp. xvii-xxxiv, here p. xxx). Secondly, it is also attested by the overall shift in Hartmann's interest from the phenomenology of the axiological experience to stratified ontology.

source (the value as an entity existing in itself). «The "material"» – writes Hartmann, in his search for maximum precision – «is only the concrete structure which has the value»[14], not the value itself. This distinction is the basis of the Hartmannian ethical concept of what is a good:

> Values are not only independent of the things that are valuable (goods), but are actually their prerequisite. They are that whereby things – and in a wider sense real entities and relations of every kind – possess the character of "goods"; that is, they are that through which things are valuable[15].

In *Ethics*, the relationship of trust among different persons appears as one of the examples that can better exemplify the complex structure of the axiological experience, and in particular the distinction between the level of ideal values and the "material" level of goods.

> The moral worth of trust is not the trust itself. The latter is only the material – a specific relation between person and person, which can be quite generally described. But the value of trust is not this relation, and indeed is not only not an actual relation between particular persons, but is also not the idea of such a relation in general. It is, taken by itself, purely an ontological structure, not axiological; it is the ideal or essential structure of a specially formed relationship[16].

Part of the "material" of the axiological experience is the grasping of the quality of the being-a-good owned by particular things, events or relationships. Such quality, intuitively evident for the subject, derives from their connection to the values. But, if we read carefully the last quote, we can see that the net of relationships that shows itself inside the axiological experience is more complex still. Its elements are not only a moral subject (the person) and a good (a concrete thing or situation, that in this case is an intersubjective one), but also the representation of a class of similar goods (the phenomenally given "essence" of the goods) and the ideal value (the value in itself, which, through mediation by the human subject, is at the basis both of the good and of the phenomenological essence).

Both the latter elements make the axiological *Erlebnis* of trust "protrude" towards the ideal being, thus exemplifying the way in which a distant value can permeate of itself a concrete intersubjective situation. But always in *Ethics*, trust also appears in the pages Hartmann dedicates to the analysis

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[14] N. Hartmann, *Ethics I*, cit., p. 217.
[15] *Ivi*, p. 186.
[16] *Ivi*, p. 217.

of individual values and virtues, trying to explain how it is possible that, although ideal and timeless in themselves, values can be so differently distributed in individual consciousness and over different historical periods. With explicit links to Nietzsche and Scheler, Hartmann identifies distinct groups of virtues, each of which is centred on a leading value and has exercised hegemony in different periods:

> an historical survey shows that several specific groups of virtues can be distinguished. [...] Three groups are to be discriminated. For the first two a basic value can be assigned (justice and brotherly love), about which the other cluster. The first correspond nearest to the ethos of antiquity, the second of Christianity[17].

The third group of virtues, the less definite one, is broadly inspired by the Nietzschean «love of the remote [*Fernstenliebe*]»[18] and exerts its influence mostly in contemporary times. In this context, trust and trustworthiness appear as belonging to the second group of moral values (together with truthfulness, uprightness, faith and fidelity); they are also historically linked to the hegemony of Christianity (when «brotherly love surpasses justice»[19]). In order for this last thesis about trust to be understood, two clarifications must be made. The first is that the comparative perspective here adopted by Hartmann does not move from genuinely religious interests, or even less from metaphysical assumptions; Christianity is understood here as a new style of moral life, as the ethos of a new age. Secondly, it should be emphasised that the historical succession of different phases of hegemony does not contradict the thesis of the timelessness of values. Different ages do not create or set values; they limit themselves to highlighting a particular constellation of timeless values arranged around a fundamental value and virtue. The relativity of the historical (or individual) adoption of a hegemonic value does not prejudice, for Hartmann, the absoluteness of the value understood as an ideal entity[20].

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17 N. Hartmann, *Ethics II*, cit., p. 226.
18 *Ivi*, pp. 311-331.
19 *Ivi*, p. 267.
20 On this issue cfr. N. Hartmann, *Vom Wesen sittlicher Forderungen*, in *Kleinere Schriften*, Bd. I: *Abhandlungen zur systematischen Philosophie*, Walter de Gruyter & Co., Berlin 1955, pp. 279-311, and the discussion of the difference between value and validity in L. Kopciuch, *The Ethical Notions and Relativism in Culture in the Context of German Material Ethics of Value*, in «Studies in Logic, Grammar and Rhetoric», 28 (41), 2012, pp. 83-94, here pp. 86-88. For the transition from the ancient world to Christianity, Antonio Da Re rightly speaks of the "progressive discovery of an axiological field ["la progressiva scoperta di un ambito assiologico"] (A. Da Re, *Tra antico e moderno. Nicolai Hartmann e l'etica materiale dei valori*, Guerini e Associati, Milano 1996, p. 230).

2.3. *The emergence of the ontological perspective, on the subject's side: the person as "moral substance"*

In *Ethics*, Hartmann's reflection on trust takes a third path alongside those, already considered, of the exemplification of the ideal value and the treatment of the historical hegemony of different value systems. In the section *The Identity and Substance of the Moral Person*, an aspect of the axiological-relational structure of trust appears that will become prevalent in later Hartmannian works[21]. This aspect is the dependence of trust and trustworthiness on the moral subject's capacity to last, namely on the numerical and chronological identity of the person. The connection between trust and trustworthiness on the one side, and the ontological prerequisite of permanence on the other, is provided by the essential openness to the future of the axiological phenomenon of trust itself. When he makes a promise[22], writes Hartmann, a reliable, trustworthy person arises like «an identical and abiding element» that «stands over against the coming and going of the determinational factor, whether inward or external»[23]. On the subject's side, for the value of trustworthiness to be realised

all depends upon the element of self-conservation. In the fixed resolution there is something which remains the same, the continuity of which overlaps the temporal process. […] Behind this volition there is ultimately the identity of the person itself. […] [And] the morally mature man has this power; he can determine beforehand what he is going to will and to do[24].

Opening a perspective that (as we shall see) he will also retain in ontological texts subsequent to *Ethics*, Hartmann places at the centre of his axiological analysis of trust the issue of the persistence of the moral subject in an ontological context characterised by becoming and processuality. This durability, proper to the trustworthy man, is understood by Hartmann as an active identification of the present self with the future self: «one who promises identifies itself as he is now with what he will be later. […] The breaking of a promise

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[21] Nicolai Hartmann, *Ethics II*, cit., pp. 287-288. This very brief section is a sort of irruption of Hartmann's ontological interests in the middle of the phenomenological (and Schelerian) discussion of the virtues and values of Christianity.

[22] As possessive adjective and pronoun for 'the person' we chose respectively 'his' and 'him', to avoid the connotation of neutrality and impersonality of 'its', 'it'. A greater accuracy would be obtained through 'his / her' and 'him / her', but this choice would make the reading harder. In our intention, however, the female form is always included.

[23] *Ivi*, p. 287.

[24] *Ibidem*.

would be a renunciation of himself, its fulfilment a holding fast to himself»[25].

Continuing a Kantian and then Schelerian position, in *Ethics* Hartmann sees this peculiar ability to endure as a faculty that pertains to man not as a natural being but as a moral being: «on this personal identity depends a man's moral continuity in contrast to all natural and empirical instability»[26]. Moreover, this continuity is defined, in a very problematic way, as a form of substantiality; on this kind of durability, writes Hartmann, depends «the ethical substance of the person»[27]. The two traits – the opposition to naturalness and the ethical substantiality of the person – find themselves united in statements like the following: «it is the essential superiority of the moral over the natural constitution of a man, that he possesses such identity, such substantiality»[28]. In *Ethics*, the brevity of the section on personal identity and (more in depth) the internal conflict between Schelerian phenomenology and nascent autonomous ontological interests does not allow us to understand how Hartmann intends the notion of moral substance. Given his profound knowledge of the *Critique of Pure Reason* and his later criticisms of this notion, it is difficult to think either that he adopts the traditional, metaphysical concept of the subject as a substantial soul, or (at the other extreme) that he uses the term "substantial" as a simple, almost harmless synonymous of "lasting". Not by chance, as we will see, one of the most relevant changes between *Ethics* and Hartmann's mature thinking (and in particular, his discussion of personal identity in *Philosophie der Natur*) will involve these two points: the substantiality of personal identity and his opposition to the naturalness of man.

3. *The ontological basis of trustworthiness:*
   the non-substantial permanence of the person

3.1. *The persistence of spiritual entities*

Even in Hartmann's mature ontological writings, his general articulation of the axiological experience does not change. It remains inspired by ideal values, whose realisation requires the work of mediation and planning by the practical subject, the person. In order to understand this mediation role, however, Hartmann focuses now predominantly on the contextual conditions

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[25] *Ivi*, p. 288.
[26] *Ibidem*.
[27] *Ibidem*.
[28] *Ibidem*.

of the possibility of the realisation of values. This shift in focus means that the basic characteristics of the real being, i.e. contingency, becoming and processuality, also become increasingly important in the axiological analysis (with a progressive decline in attention to ideal values).

One of the basic coordinates of the Hartmannian processual ontology is now the exclusion from the real being of all forms of substantiality. Substantiality – the assumption of the presence, in entities, of an immutable substratum that bears their transformations – becomes for Hartmann the result of a sort of perspective effect. This illusion arises, in the knowing subject, from the observation of inanimate objects («the thing-like object changes much more slowly than the subject, so it seems substantial to him»[29]) and is then projected on both natural entities and spiritual ones (including the person, or "self"). This does not mean that there are no lasting entities; on the contrary, Hartmann emphasises that becoming logically requires the presence of something stable that can act as a substratum for every modification. Only, this substratum is never absolutely stable or immutable. The duration of things is always relative; «in fact, what we call a thing is only a relatively stable process stage»[30]. To be more precise, for Hartmann each entity is a relatively stable phase of one of the sub-processes that make up the great flow of real being.

What is important now is to grasp the moral implications of the shift of Hartmann's interest towards the ways of relative persistence of different typologies of natural beings. This shift modifies not only how the moral subject, but also the pragmatic context, is considered. Not by chance does this transformed perspective on the axiological situation find a privileged test bench in the discussion of trust. As far as its contextual conditions of application are concerned, indeed, trust is an exigent value. It is a value that, because of its very essence, cannot be realised in one fell swoop – or better,

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[29] «Das dingliche Objekt wandelt sich viel langsamer als das Subjekt, so erscheint es ihm substantiell» (N. Hartmann, *Das Problem des geistigen Seins*, cit., p. 88). Cfr. also *Philosophie der Natur*: «intuition lacks an appropriate category to grasp the unit whose existence it rightly suspects. That is why it reaches for the nearest solution, that of a "persistent substratum". Thus arises the representation of thing-substances, of the substance of life, the substance of the soul, indeed the substance of the spirit» (original text: «es fehlt der Anschauung an einer passenden Kategorie, die Einheit zu fassen, deren Bestehen sie richtig herausspürt. Darum greift sie zur nächstenliegenden Auskunft, zu der eines "beharrenden Zugrundeliegenden". So entsteht die Vorstellung von Dingsubstanzen, der Lebenssubstanz, der Seelensubstanz, ja der Geistsubstanz»; N. Hartmann, *Philosophie der Natur*, cit., p. 317). In this paper, the translations from both ontological texts by Hartmann are mine.

[30] «In Wirklichkeit ist, was wir ein Ding nennen, nur ein relativ stabiles Prozesstadium» (N. Hartmann, *Das Problem des geistigen Seins*, cit., p. 88).

a value that, in its work of transforming a real situation, requires the duration of the context itself. In other words, for trust to be made real it is the real context itself that, notwithstanding its radical processuality, has to guarantee a (relative) ontological stability: «everything real has its reliability in the persistence of the process and its legality»[31].

Hartmann's ontological analysis focuses on the ways of persistence of entities belonging to every layer of the real being (material structures, single organisms, biological species, et cetera). Indeed, the real being is subjected in its entirety to the basic category of temporality; time is, in Hartmann's ontology, both the dimension inside which, in general, a process can display itself (that is to say, a real entity can exist) and, seen from the viewpoint of the related category of becoming, the opposing force that entities must resist[32]. What is particularly relevant to us, however, are his theses on the peculiar strategies of duration displayed by spiritual entities, both collective – natural languages, cultural traditions, political movements et cetera – and individual, such as the person (as presented in the new perspective of his ontological works, for instance in *Das Problem des geistigen Seins*). Without ever admitting substantiality in the sense of traditional metaphysics, the permanence and identity of spiritual entities are entrusted to a dynamic of active self-identification with oneself. A spiritual entity «has always to identify firstly with itself – over time and beyond the inner change. Its persistence is a spontaneous adherence to itself, a standing by itself or a remaining loyal to itself»[33]. This dynamic is thought of by Hartmann as an expression of the superior freedom of the spiritual entity: «its maintenance and its identity are based on freedom»[34].

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[31] «Alles Reale hat seine Verläßlichkeit in der Beharrung des Prozesses und seiner Gesetzlichkeit» (N. Hartmann, *Das Problem des geistigen Seins*, cit., p. 90).

[32] «Zeitlichkeit ist das kategoriale Grundmoment alles dessen, was dem Werden unterliegt. Und das ist schlechterdings alles Reale, auch […] das geistig Reale» (N. Hartmann, *Philosophie der Natur*, cit., p. 164). On the issue of permanence in Nicolai Hartmann's thinking cfr. the valuable contribution by A. Gamba, *Dal rifiuto del concetto di sostanza all'affermazione della permanenza del reale. Un itinerario attraverso la filosofia della natura di Nicolai Hartmann*, in «Rivista di filosofia neoscolastica» 2/3 (2012), pp. 385-435.

[33] «[Ein geistig-reales Wesen] muss sich immer erst mit sich selbst identifizieren – und zwar über Zeitdistanz und über den inneren Wandel hinweg. Seine Beharrung ist spontanes Festhaltung an sich, ein Für-sich-Einstehen oder sich Treubleiben» (N. Hartmann, *Das Problem des geistigen Seins*, cit., p. 90). On the issue of the permanence of the spiritual objects cfr. Daniela Angelucci, *L'oggetto poetico. Conrad, Ingarden, Hartmann*, Quodlibet, Macerata 2004, pp. 136-140.

[34] «Seine Erhaltung und seine Identität sind auf Freiheit gestellt» (N. Hartmann, *Das Problem des geistigen Seins*, cit., p. 90). On the relation between personal and objective spirit in Hartmann's work, cfr. A. Da Re, *Objective Spirit and Personal Spirit in Hartmann's Philosophy*, in «Axiomathes» 12 (2001), pp. 317-326, p. 320.

In the case of the person, this freely chosen persistence presents itself not only as a precondition of generic ontological reliability (*Verlässlichkeit*) – i.e. of the fact that, even if they are not substantial, entities of all levels have enough subsistence to support multiple relationships and changes – but also as the basis for the ethical phenomenon of trustworthiness (*Zuverlässigkeit*). If we can trust a promise or an agreement, it is thanks to the ontological phenomenon that Hartmann describes as follows:

When a person promises something or retires it, he guarantees for himself, and for himself as the future and changed self. She therefore identifies herself (as the actual) with herself as the future one, a future one that she does not yet know empirically and that she, in any case, shall know in future – to her surprise perhaps. Nobody can know how she will judge or feel after a year, let alone what her will will be […]. Nevertheless, she can guarantee for herself[35].

Hartmann's attention is not focused so much on the phenomenon of freedom, which is, however, mentioned (a person can always refuse to keep his word, that is, not identify herself with the past self that made the commitment). The philosopher addresses his wonder rather to the existence, inside the contingent and unpredictable process of the real being, of the power of the person to give herself autonomy and identity: «what is astonishing, is that he [man] "can" actually hold on to himself as something identical»[36]. This ontological force is the basis not only of trust, but of many similar phenomena of moral life. If its core, as we have seen, is the active identification with the person's future will, its expressions are manifold. A person can identify herself «with one's own goals and resolutions of the past, so with the intentions, the mistakes, the guilt of the past, so also with the sympathies, the personal confidence, the love started in the past»[37].

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[35] «Wenn der Mensch etwas verspricht oder abmacht, so sagt er damit gut für sich, und zwar für sich als den künftigen und gewandelten. Er identifiziert sich also als den jetzigen mit sich als dem künftigen, den er empirisch noch nicht kennt und den er jedenfalls erst erfahren wird – zu seiner Überraschung vielleicht. Niemand kann Wissen, wie er nach einem Jahr urteilen oder Empfinden wird, geschweige denn, was er wollen wird […]. Dennoch kann er für sich gut sagen» (N. Hartmann, *Das Problem des geistigen Seins*, cit., p. 91). On the case study of the promise in Hartmann cfr. A. Gamba, *Dal rifiuto del concetto di sostanza all'affermazione della permanenza del reale*, cit., p. 432.

[36] «Das Erstaunliche aber ist schon, dass er [der Mensch] überhaupt an sich als einem Identischen festhalten "kann"» (*ibidem*).

[37] «[…] mit den eigenen Zielen und Vorsätzen von einst, so mit der Gesinnungen, den Fehlern, der Schuld von einst, so auch mit den Sympathien, dem persönlichen Zutrauen, der Liebe von einst» (*ibidem*).

3.2. *The consistency (Konsistenz) of the person in Hartmann's ontology of nature*

In *Das Problem des geistigen Seins*, Hartmann does not limit himself to tracing an external analogy between the persistence of collective spiritual entities and the persistence of the person. It is true that the duration of both is the result of the active and consequent identification of oneself with oneself, but this capacity is proper to individual persons, who are therefore the material bearers of collective entities[38]. In the second of the ontological works we have chosen to discuss, *Philosophie der Natur*, the ontological context is wider still. In this work, Hartmann on the one hand takes into consideration the basic categories of the whole real being (temporality, becoming, processuality), and on the other concentrates on that internal sphere of the real being which is nature (subdivided, in turn, into inorganic and organic entities). Through this analysis, the persistence mode typical of the person (and of the collective spiritual beings based on the person) is inserted into a much broader ontological framework in which several similar phenomena emerge – that is to say, multiple strategies of ontological permanence based on the active identification and recovery of oneself. In *Philosophie der Natur*, Hartmann proposes for this duration mode a specific category, i.e. consistency (*Konsistenz*), contrasting it with other categories (in particular subsistence, *Subsistenz*, the most substance-like strategy, peculiar to inorganic entities). At the same time, the persistence mode of the person is seen as a process that is not only rooted in the dynamics of being real, but is also very close to the strategies of duration of other natural entities. In doing so, Hartmann does not seek to naturalise the person (whose character of spiritual entity is reaffirmed even in *Philosophie der Natur*). His intent is to show that the strategy of subsistence that the person unfolds and declines in an ethical sense – which allows us to examine it as an ontological precondition of the axiological phenomenon of trust – has strong lines of continuity with the natural world. This continuity is based on the unity and categorical cohesion of the real being (of which nature and spirit are two levels).

However, comparison with organic entities is not absent from *Das Problem des geistigen Seins*. In this text, for instance, the life of a biological species (based as it is on the reproduction of its members) is already presented as one of the ontologically possible non-substantial duration forms: «here

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[38] «[Solche Gebilde entstehen und vergehen] rein empirisch, unter unseren Augen, als persönlicher Geist. In jedem Mensch hat er [der Geist] sein Erwachen und sein Einschlafen» (*ivi*, p. 92).

permanence does not take the form of subsistence – there is no unchanging identical – but that of superexistence, that is, a higher-order life process, borne by the comings and goings of the individuals, goes beyond them and away from them»[39]. Although rendered similar by non-substantiality, however, the super-existence of biological species and the persistence of collective spiritual entities in *Das Problem des geistigen Seins* are kept distinctly distinct by Hartmann: «diverse [is] the spirit in his transformations. Neither is it based on substance, nor does he ever form himself again into what he was. He insists neither mechanically, by inertia, nor organically, by reproduction»[40]. In *Philosophie der Natur*, instead, what prevails is the ontological closeness between these two (and other) modes of permanence.

Here, as anticipated above, Hartmann sketches a relevant ontological distinction between two forms of duration: subsistence (*Subsistenz*) and consistency (*Konsistenz*)[41]. The first is characteristic of entities closely linked to a material substrate, and therefore more to the spatial than to the temporal dimension; the second is typical of entities that, although dependent on a material substratum for their factual existence, are largely autonomous from it in their composition and organisation. Entities of the second group – biological species, morphogenetic processes, natural languages, art styles, institutions, persons, et cetera – unfold their existence predominantly over time. The sense of closeness, which through the category of the *Konsistenz* Hartmann proposes between the most complex natural entities and spiritual entities, is specified through reference to their common dimension of deployment: temporality. And, writes Hartmann, «the basic phenomenon of temporality […] consists, precisely, in this never-being-together, in this separation into time, […] [in] the division of the permanent into stages of succession»[42]. With an expression of great conceptual depth, Hartmann

[39] «die Beharrung hat hier nicht die Form der Subsistenz – es beharrt kein unwandelbar Identisches, – sondern die der Superexistenz, d. h eines Lebensprozesses höherer Ordnung, der getragen vom Kommen und Gehen der Individuen, über ihnen und über sie weg fortgeht» (*ivi*, p. 90).

[40] «anders [ist] der Geist in seinem Wandel. Ihm liegt weder Substanz zugrunde noch bildet er sich jemals wieder als das, was er war. Er beharrt weder mechanisch durch Trägheit noch organisch durch Reproduktion» (*ibidem*).

[41] In the essay of 1944 *Naturphilosophie und Anthropologie*, the link between the *Superexistenz* of the biological species and the category of the *Konsistenz* is fully explicit; both are thought of as different forms of «a category of self-preservation of another and evidently higher kind» (original text: «eine Erhaltungskategorie anderer und offenbar höherer Art»; N. Hartmann, *Naturphilosophie und Anthropologie*, in *Studien zur neuen Ontologie und Anthropologie*, De Gruyter, 2014, p. 361).

[42] «Das Grundphänomen der Zeitlichkeit […] besteht in eben diesem Niemals-Beisammensein, diesem Auseinandergezogensein in die Zeit, […] [im] Aufgeteiltsein des Dauernden in die Stadien des Nacheinander» (N. Hartmann, *Philosophie der Natur*, cit., p. 167).

calls this fragmentation of the durable in successive stages, a «postponed identity [*verschobene Identität*]»[43]. With it we approach the core of the category of consistency as active resumption of a diachronic Gestalt. In biological phenomena, this kind of deferred identity is described as «the being-based of the higher form on the mobile structure of the processes, a structure in which the lower form relentlessly passes away and re-emerges»[44]. In the case of the person, in a line of substantial continuity with the reflection on personal identity started in *Ethics*, *Konsistenz* is described as «an active adhesion to oneself, a self-assertion as a unity against one's own disintegration in the flow of experience»[45]. Thus, even if a person is still considered a spiritual entity (in the Hartmannian sense), in the *Philosophie der Natur* the strategy of persistence of that person shows a common ontological root with many natural entities[46].

The consideration of personal identity as a peculiar form of deferred identity gives ontological concreteness to a basic trait of the axiological situations of giving and receiving trust. Indeed, this kind of identity requires from the subject a constant commitment – not only in order to last, but also in order to be trustworthy for others. Each of us, writes Hartmann, is caught between two possible modes of existence. To exist «as a reliable unit, or

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[43] *Ivi*, p. 349. Incidentally, this distinction continues, in an extremely original way, the Kantian reflection on the possibility of thinking about the permanence of the ego after having excluded the possibility of applying to it the category of substance; see I. Kant, *Critique of pure reason*, B416-B421, ed. MacMillan, London, 1929, pp. 375-377.

[44] «das Ruhen der höheren Form auf dem beweglichen Gefüge der Prozesse, in welchem die niedere unausgesetzt vergeht und wieder entsteht» (N. Hartmann, *Philosophie der Natur*, cit., p. 579). In Hartmann's ontology of nature, the closeness of the different strategies of persistence (due to the category of *Konsistenz*) not only makes the person's opposition to nature disappear but also removes any mechanist assumption from the interpretation of higher vital phenomena.

[45] «[Konsistenz ist] aktives Festhalten an sich, ein Sich-Durchsetzen als Einheit gegen das eigene Zerfliessen im Erlebnisstrome» (*ivi*, p. 312).

[46] In an extraordinary section of the *Philosophie der Natur,* whose title is "Erhaltung des Ich und der moralischen Person", Hartmann focuses on prodigy («Wunder») that is the permanence, in the contingent macro-process of the world, of the human subject in all its forms – as self, as consciousness and as a moral person. This contribution focuses on the third one here, but it is necessary at least to mention the way in which Hartmann sets up the analysis of the other two anthropological instances (which belong, for Hartmann, to the ontological level of psychic being): «The ego is not substance, but it has constancy in the change of its states, acts and contents», and «how is it possible, anyway, for the whole of consciousness to remain identical, while everything tangible content is constantly changing inside it?» (original texts: «Das Ich ist nicht Substanz, aber es hat Konstanz im Wandel seiner Zustände, Akte und Inhalte»; and «Wie aber ist es möglich, dass das Ganze des Bewusstseins identisch bleibt, während alles inhaltlich Greifbare in ihm unausgesetzt wechselt?»; *ivi*, p. 311).

as something disintegrating and vanishing in the flight of experience»[47]; in fact, «as a moral person, the self can also release itself from itself; he can pass over accepted commitments, can deny his actions […]. In this way he gives up its identity. But he can also commit to his actions, assume his guilt, […] stand by his word»[48]. We can feel confidence and trust only towards subjects who show this commitment to their self-maintenance. To last as a "consistent" moral subject requires commitment. In Hartmann's ontological works, the effort of maintaining self-identity as the ontological precondition of trust is frequently emphasised. As he writes in *Das Problem des geistigen Seins*: «the unity of personal being does not occasionally strike you; it is, and remains, a question of commitment, of standing up for oneself, of strength»[49] – a concept that is effectively repeated in *Philosophie der Natur*: «the preservation of one's own person does not fall into man's lap»[50].

4. *Concluding remarks*

If we look at the path we have navigated, in Hartmann's analysis of the phenomenon of trust we can identify a decisive shift in his attention from the theme of values to that of the context of the realisation of values. As we have seen, the basic theoretical context does not change: the axiological situation of giving and receiving trust would not be established without man's reliance on the value of trust itself – that "grasping" which is so well described in *Ethics*. At the same time, however, in Hartmann's ontological works the proportional weight of the value analysis decreases progressively. What completely disappears is the tendency, of a still Schelerian approach, to order and classify values (which in *Ethics*, as we have seen, leads to the thesis of the subsequent axiological hegemony of justice and personal love in antiquity and in Christianity). What, instead, remain are references to

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[47] «"[Die Person ist gesehen] als verlässliche Einheit oder als ein zerfallendes Etwas in der Flucht des Erlebens Aufgehende» (*ivi*, p. 312).

[48] «als moralische Person kann das Ich sich auch von sich lossagen; er kann übernommene Verpflichtungen abwälzen, kann seine Taten, die in seine Entscheidung gestellt waren, verleugnen. Damit gibt es seine Identität preis. Er kann aber auch sich zu seinen Taten bekennen, verwirkte Schuld auf sich nehmen, Zugesagtes einhalten, zu seinem Worte stehen (*ibidem*).

[49] «Die Einheit des persönlichen Seins fällt einem nicht zu, sie ist und bleib immer eine Frage des Insatzes, des Einstehen für sich, der Kraft» (N. Hartmann, *Das Problem des geistigen Seins*, cit., p. 91).

[50] «Von selbst fällt dem Menschen die Erhaltung der eigenen Person nicht in den Schoß» (N. Hartmann, *Philosophie der Natur*, cit., p. 312).

values as ideal entities and to man as mediator between ideal and real be-
ing; they are, however, drastically reduced in their breadth and importance.

What in parallel increases is Hartmann's attention to the context of reali-
sation of the values and, particularly, of the value of trust. In an ontological
framework characterised by a radical contingency, temporality and proces-
suality – in which every entity appears in its real nature as a process phase
and in which none of such phases recurs in exactly the same form – the
value of trust appears as one of the most difficult to realise. In fact, in its very
essence, the axiological situation of trust requires duration and stability, in
both the subject who asks for it and the one who grants it (and who therefore
appears, also phenomenologically, as trustworthy). Thus, as we have seen,
already in *Ethics* Hartmann begins to question the modalities of persistence
of the person, introducing some of the key concepts of his subsequent analy-
ses (process, identity, self-preservation, persistence).

In this text, however, not only does this issue still appear to be occasional,
but the answer seems to have recourse to a non-natural, still metaphysical
trait of the person, i.e. his moral substantiality (which is no longer defined).
In the two later ontological works we have considered (which, however, are
consistent with the remainder of the Hartmannian *corpus*), the problem of
trust is contextualised in the more general question of how a person endures
– which is, in turn, a particular side of the wider issue of the ontological reli-
ability (*Verlässlichkeit*) and permanence (*Beharrung*) of real entities in that
macro-process that the real being is. The clear-cut criticism that Hartmann
addresses to any kind of substantiality leads to the complete disappearance
of the view of the person as moral substance. Moreover, the fact that natural
entities and spiritual entities share the ontological sphere of real being (and
its problems, above all the need to resist time and becoming) leads to the
disappearance of the opposition of the person to nature. The specificity of
the moral persona – the ethical declination of the deferred identity, of the
Konsistenz – shows relevant lines of continuity with the modalities of perma-
nence of other complex entities of the real being, in particular organic ones
(i.e., biological species). However, it is necessary to be precise. The inser-
tion into the process of the real being, not only of man as a psychophysical
entity but also of the person as a spiritual and moral subject, does not aim
to naturalise the person himself. Not only does the spirit (personal and col-
lective) remain well distinct from nature, but (as we have seen through the
prism of trust) the specificity of the ethical way to the *Konsistenz*, of the
moral effort for self-maintenance, is constantly underlined by Hartmann.

Abstract

*This paper focuses on the issue of trust (*Vertrauen*) and trustworthiness (*Zuverlässigkeit*) in Nicolai Hartmann's stratified ontology. Our analysis will start with Hartmann's* Ethics *(1926) and then discuss parts of* Das Problem des geistigen Seins *(1933) and* Philosophie der Natur *(1950). In his mature works, Hartmann approaches the axiological situation of trust from the viewpoint of the permanence of all elements involved in it: trust as an ideal value, the tangible goods that substantiate a relationship of trust, the other persons and, finally, the moral subject or person (for others to trust me, my personal identity must be stable). From this viewpoint, for trust to be made real it is the whole ontological context that, notwithstanding its processuality, has to guarantee a (relative) ontological stability. This approach gives Hartmann the opportunity to address a harsh criticism to philosophical substantialism and to develop an innovative view of the modality of ontological persistence of the person.*

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