

A Pluralist Ontology? Hartmann and Heisenberg, Two Thinkers of the Multiple Levels of Reality

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The aim of this study is to handle the question of the structure of the world: is the world fully homogenous, that is constituted of *phaenomena* which can be all fully explained by one single system of laws or is it articulated in different, independent, levels of reality which are irreducible to any of them? In order to advance a partial answer to this question, we will analyze the arguments in favor of the second, emergentist thesis of Nicolai Hartmann and Werner Heisenberg. Both authors although it is highly probable they did not know their mutual work, developed almost simultaneously two similar yet at the same time different emergentist systems. Indeed, Heisenberg finishes his manuscript in 1942 (only published in 1984 under the title of *Reality and its Order*), while Hartmann published at the same year his *Neue Wege der Ontologie*.

In relation to these two systems, it will be our purpose to show the common points as well as their differences, in order to determine which system is more compelling for defending a plural ontology of reality. Finally, the analysis will be radicalized by putting the question whether a pure pluralist ontology is defendable or not.

First of all, one can observe striking similarities between Hartmann's and Heisenberg's system on the level of their content as well as on the level of their general philosophical backgrounds. Indeed, Hartmann, just as Heisenberg, divides reality into four levels.¹ These four levels are coextensional in both systems. They go from the inorganic to the organic level, followed by the psychic, and finally the spiritual level (these two last levels are named by Heisenberg as the level of consciousness and what transcends individual consciousness). Moreover the organization of these four levels is essentially identical, since it is hierarchical in both systems. This means that the lower levels can subsist without the upper levels, but not the opposite—what Hartmann calls the law of indifference. Finally, there is a common background from which these two systems arise, namely, the Cartesian dualism between the external, spatial world, which correspond to the first two levels and the inner world, which correspond to the two second levels.

¹ Although Heisenberg uses the concept of region (*Bereich*), reserving the concept of level (*Schicht*) for the epistemological and not the ontological level.

However, an essential difference remains between Hartmann's and Heisenberg's emergentist systems concerning their scope. Hartmann considers his doctrine of the levels as being the outcome of the quest for the universal fundamental structures of reality, a quest that began already with the Ancient Greeks. Meanwhile, the scope of Heisenberg's theory of the different regions of reality is to describe systematically a new vision of the structure of the world. This vision arises, according to him, from a particular new historical fact, i.e., the development of modern physics, more precisely relativist and most of all quantum physics. The scope of Heisenberg's theory is neither universal nor implies that this vision cannot be challenged by new scientific developments. Thus, in order to choose between these two systems, one important question would be whether it is possible to build a universal ontological system without taking into account the modern developments of science (Hartmann does not indeed take into account relativist physics for conceptualizing the cosmological level of his system), and the incomplete character it implies. This arises a deeper question: what is the purpose of an ontological theory? Accounting for the complete, fundamental structure of reality or proposing a worldview adequate to the contemporary development of science?