

Organism and World in Hartmann's *Neue Wege der Ontologie*

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“The organism is an element in the world” (Hartmann, *NOW*, 43). What does it mean to be such an element? And why should a chapter on the ontological stratification of the world begin with an interest in the way organisms constitute one element in the world? It seems, preliminarily, that the way an organism is, has something to do with the world-ordering from which all ontology, all understanding of reality, must begin. Yet, for Hartmann, no science, and least of all metaphysics classically conceived, has purchase on the meaning of organic life. Both science and metaphysics come in either at too high a level or too low. In the modern understanding of the sciences, the meaning of life is reduced to mechanism; under the rubric of Aristotelian and Platonic metaphysics, which has also provided, in a sense, the guiding star of psychology and anthropology, organism is understood according to the logic of ends. Yet, as Hartmann argues, neither the mechanical nor the teleological way of coming to know life enters into the question and problem of the peculiar way of being that life is. Now, according to Hartmann, the organism, as an element of the world, is a structuring cause, an entity from which the way of beings at higher strata follows and towards which beings at lower strata aim. And yet, this aiming and following give an incomplete picture of the middle – that is life – which Hartmann’s work uniquely and ingenuously fleshes out. For, without this picture of the middle, Hartmann is quite right to argue that we misunderstand the whole – that is, Being.

For the sake of making Hartmann’s views somewhat more familiar, my essay will locate the latter between Henri Bergson and Martin Heidegger. Hartmann, like Bergson, criticizes the life sciences for attempting to apply the categories of materialism and finalism to living systems; yet, in a major deviation from Bergson, Hartmann proposes a unifying system of stratified categories that intersect, but overflow the categories of life. This is Hartmann’s new ontology, which is formulated in response to a concern he shares with Heidegger for the sense of Being as such; yet, in what should serve as a corrective to Heidegger, Hartmann takes painstaking care in his delineation, and cross-pollination, to critically interrogate the regional ontologies. On Hartmann’s account, and here again in line with Bergson, the overarching world-structure unifies a variegated field of regions as diverse as the sciences, but without peremptorily subjecting any one of these ontic divisions ontologically to the categories of another.

Threading a course between Bergson and Heidegger, I mean to draw out of Hartmann, by way of original research, a sense of what he has to contribute to contemporary discussions in ontology. It is my thesis that Hartmann’s new ontology can

provide a powerful corrective to Heidegger's work in particular, and that Hartmann's philosophy provides a way of bringing the sense of life that we have in the flesh back into the denuded meaning of life that Heidegger assumes in his early works, namely, the life of *Dasein*. That is, Hartmann bridges a gap between a sort of raw ontology which asks after the meaning of Being, and a more vital philosophy that asks after the meaning of life. Hartmann, thereby, provides us with an ontological sense of how organisms inhabit the world which is there for them.