

The Priority of the Lower: Axiological and Ontological Relations in Nicolai Hartmann's Value Theory

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Nicolai Hartmann produced one of the most fully developed and underappreciated pluralistic value theories in the history of Western philosophy. According to Hartmann, moral life is life in the midst of conflicts of values, and our task is to resolve these conflicts as best we can. Dealing with these conflicts requires an account of the value domain for the purpose of rank ordering values, in hopes that the value ranking will provide some guidance for settling conflicts (Hartmann 1932). This paper will focus on Hartmann's conception of the relations between what he calls goods and moral values, and will consider their bearing on the task of prioritization of values in social-ethical life. It examines Hartmann's claim that "lower" values have a certain priority. Although inspired by Max Scheler's *Formalism in Ethics* (1916), Hartmann's theory differs markedly in its discussion of the multi-dimensionality of the value scale. While Scheler's scale may be regarded as occupying a single vertical dimension of value height, Hartmann claims that an independent dimension of strength should also be used to characterize it. Beginning with "Scheler's Law"—the distinction between values intended in acts and values of the intention which "ride on the back of" the act—Hartmann distinguished between goods values and moral values and described the kinds of relations between them. These include relations of axiological and ontological dependence, and help to characterize the two scalar dimensions of value "height" and "strength." *Axiological* dependence applies to the substantive (content) relationship between the two types of values, the goods themselves and the human social and moral values (Hartmann 1932, 26-27). There are also *ontological* relations of dependence implied in our relations to the things regarded as valuable: moral values are ontologically dependent on goods and vital values (Hartmann 2014, 336). They are conditions of the existence for the whole realm of (higher) moral goods and virtues. This has direct implications for his normative recommendation of producing a "synthesis" of values in the resolution of value conflicts—we must not to violate the lower while facilitating the higher. Strength pertains primarily to the actualization of one value and actualization of another; if one has to be actualized before the other can be (e.g., where certain goods values provide existential and axiological condition of the higher moral values), we have an ontological dependence relation, not merely one of axiological height (Hartmann 1932, 452). This claim has an important meaning for the moral task of value prioritization. It means that "[t]he fulfillment of the lower takes precedence, because with its violation the fulfillment of the higher is endangered" (Hartmann 1932, 453). Hartmann's value theory describes a relation of values that is both intuitive and of contemporary relevance. Environmentalism

in particular would benefit from Hartmann's analysis of the relation between moral and goods values, since on his account it becomes patently obvious that stronger (vital) values have to be actualized in order for higher moral values (e.g., respect for life) to be actualized at all. Hartmann's theory shows that stronger vital values as constituents of growth, reproduction and flourishing of human and nonhuman communities must be respected as axiological and ontological constituents of the actualization of higher moral values.

Works Cited

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