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PREVIEW

TITLE

THE OBJECTIVITY OF VALUES: A STUDY OF THE

ETHICS OF NICOLAI HARTMANN

BY

Dorothy G. Park

APPROVED

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PREVIEW

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ETHICS OF NICOLAI HARTMANN

By

Dorothy G. Park

A Dissertation

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To

ALL THOSE OF MY FAMILY AND FRIENDS WHO
HAVE STOOD BY ME SO FAITHFULLY THROUGH
THE YEARS OF PREPARATION.

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**"Kein Wesen kann zu nichts zerfallen,
Das Ewig regt sich fort in allen."**

--Goethe

THE OBJECTIVITY OF VALUE: A STUDY OF THE
ETHICS OF NICOLAI HARTMANN

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
PREFACE.....	1
INTRODUCTION.....	4
CHAPTER I Exposition of Hartmann's Value Theory.....	11
CHAPTER II The Alternative of Subjectivism.....	40
CHAPTER III An English View of Objectivity.....	78
CHAPTER IV An American View of Objectivity.....	90
CHAPTER V A Criticism of the Doctrine of Value Essences	111
CONCLUSION.....	124
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	128

PREFACE

The following study purports to be a critical investigation of the problem of the objectivity of value, particularly as treated in the Ethics of Professor Nicolai Hartmann of the University of Berlin.

Before coming to the University of Berlin, Hartmann was Professor of Philosophy at Marburg and then at the University of Cologne until 1931. He had contributed to the field of philosophy various magazine articles and a large work, Outlines of a Metaphysic of Knowledge^{1.} (1921), before publishing his monumental work, Ethics^{2.} (1926), which provides the foundation of the present study.

The philosophers of the past who have most influenced Hartmann are, first of all, Plato and then Kant; later Leibniz and Hegel, and finally Aristotle. With the publication^{1.} of his first large work, Hartmann broke away from Neo-Kantianism and Idealism and adopted the point of view of^{3.} ontological Realism.

In the Ethics, which was translated in 1932, he applies^{4.} the phenomenological method of Edmund Husserl and Max

1. Metaphysik der Erkenntnis.

2. Ethik.

3. Although Hartmann would perhaps refuse allegiance to any "ism", the critics in general, classify him as a realist. The above account follows Professor Coit's preface to the English translation (1932).

4. Vide "Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologische Philosophie" in Jahrbuch für Philosophie und phänomenologische Forschung, Vol. I Part I.

5. Scheler to the study of values. The first section of the book (Volume I of the translation) is devoted to the "phenomenological structure of values". The other sections deal with an analysis of the different concrete moral values and of moral freedom.

In "concrete ethics", as revealed by Scheler, Hartmann finds a synthesis of the Kantian conception of the apriority of the moral law with the insight of Nietzsche into the manifoldness of the values themselves. In the work of Aristotle, "the ancient master of ethical research", Hartmann finds "a highly developed concrete ethics of values, not in concept or conscious intention, but certainly in fact and in actual procedure"^{6.} With this background and on this basis, Hartmann's "conscious intention" is to develop a concrete ethics of values which shall be a synthesis of the ancient (Platonic and Aristotelian) and modern (Kantian) traditions of ethics.

From this brief glance at the scope and purpose of Hartmann's Ethics the reader may perhaps gain some idea of the exhaustive treatment of values which is undertaken from this relatively new point of view. From the first it is obvious that Hartmann's conception of value is essentially objective, that in fact, this is the keynote of his ethics. The question of the objectivity of value has become of vital interest to a majority of moral philosophers of today, but

5. Vide Der Formalismus in der Ethik und die materiale Wertethik (1921).

6. Ethics, Hartmann's Foreword p.17.

in no instance has it received such elaborate and original investigation as at the hands of Hartmann. Hartmann's value essence theory is reminiscent of Plato, but his development of the doctrine is unique, not only among German philosophies, but also English and American.

From such a source the present study has received its inspiration. We have conceived of objectivity as the heart of the value situation. Hence our thesis is an analysis of the objectivity of value.

I wish to express my sincere thanks to Dr. W. H. Werkmeister for helpful suggestions on the translation from the German original back in 1930, to Dr. Charles Patterson for encouragement at all times, to Dr. O. K. Bouwsma for helpful criticism through the many revisions which this thesis has undergone, and to Professor E. L. Hinman for kindly pertinent suggestions and advice during all my graduate work. For confirmation of certain points in the criticism of Professor Parker's theory I am indebted to Dr. Raymond Hoekstra of the University of Michigan. I wish also to express my gratitude to Professor W. M. Urban of Yale University for his friendly encouragement.

DOROTHY G. PARK

University of Nebraska

May, 1937.

INTRODUCTION

Our problem is that of the objectivity of values. In modern value theory this is the paramount issue. No discussion of value is complete without a treatment of it. No definition of value is possible without a recognition of this question. Any value theory, even a theory which holds that value is indefinable, must commit itself upon this fundamental issue. The question of objectivity is a question as to the nature of value itself, its form, status, and definition, if it be definable.

In order to pave the way for profitable discussion let us see if we can formulate a clear statement as to just what we mean by the term, objectivity. Since the terms "objective" and "subjective" are sometimes used in different senses by different philosophies we shall try to avoid ambiguity by selecting the simplest and most common philosophical usage.

Objectivity is often defined as "independence from experience"^{1.} or independence from the experience of knowing persons. This is still a little ambiguous. We might, of course, define objectivity in terms of "subject", taken in the strictly epistemological sense. Then a definition of value which involves the idea "subject" would be termed subjective and a definition of value which does not involve the

1. This is the most common philosophical usage says Benno Tapper in The International Journal of Ethics, July, 1930 pp. 519, 525.

idea "subject" would be termed objective.

But perhaps this should be still further clarified. We might say that a subjective theory of value implies that value always involves some psychical element while an objective theory implies that value involves no psychical element whatsoever. This statement seems reasonably clear, but we shall further try to define just what we mean by "psychical element".

Among the specific psychical elements which have been considered by various philosophers as essential to value we might mention desire, pleasure, interest, fulfilment, and approval. All these elements may involve consciousness, but in the case of desire and interest I think consciousness is not necessarily always involved. Hence we cannot say that objectivity is just "independence of consciousness", although it may be true that value is independent of consciousness.

By "psychical element" we mean an element involving an organism, which, of course, includes conscious organisms. This distinction makes for greater clearness in that the issue of objectivity cannot now be confused with the question of value being defined as some relationship to the Absolute or God, for the Absolute is obviously not an organism.

We might then formulate our definition thus: a subjective theory would define value as related to or involving some reference to an organism; an objective theory would define value without reference to an organism and as independent of any organism.

Another way of stating the issue would be in terms of a

2.

naturalistic or non-naturalistic ethics². A naturalistic ethics is one which maintains that good is definable in terms of physical or psychical categories. Thus the subjective value theory leads to a naturalistic ethics. On the other hand, a non-naturalistic ethics maintains that the word good refers to a unique characteristic which is incapable of analysis in physical or psychical terms.

Since the problem of the objectivity of value is primarily one of the definition of value it may be well to make clear just what we mean by definition. In the first place, we certainly do not mean a mere verbal definition as to how people in general use the word good or value, as modern axiology has it. Nevertheless we shall try to avoid going contrary to ordinary usage, for we wish to reach a common understanding, if possible. Neither do we mean a genetic definition which traces the origin and history of value. The Aristotelian type of definition according to genus and differentia is perhaps not significant in relation to our problem. The type of definition which has significance for ethics is one which enumerates the parts of which a complex is composed, reducing them to still simpler parts and showing the relationship of the parts within the whole³.

In the ensuing discussion, I propose, first to expound

². These are the terms used by G. E. Moore. All subjective theories and some types of objective idealism fall into what he calls the "naturalistic fallacy". Principia Ethica, pp. 38-58.

³. For these suggestions I am partially indebted to Professor G. E. Moore. Principia Ethica, pp. 6-9.

Hartmann's theory of the nature of value, and then, by way of contrast, to consider the definitions of value which are held by representatives of the chief ethical theories prevailing today.

Such a discussion of other theories is advisable and even necessary, for several reasons. In the first place, the view which Hartmann advances is developed in the context of current views in Germany and the author makes no explicit reference to other value theories which have attained prominence in England and in America. As certain of these latter theories contain elements very similar to the views of Hartmann, an understanding of one theory will help to clarify the others.

In the second place, although Hartmann's account of value is expository rather than argumentative, the critic of Hartmann must take cognizance of alternative theories which concern the same issues, if a fair estimation is to be reached. Thus both for the purposes of clear exposition and adequate criticism it is necessary to discriminate between Hartmann's view and other competing theories.

Accordingly, in the first chapter, I shall attempt to give an intelligible account of the objective theory of value expounded by Hartmann. In the second chapter I shall try to show the falsity of the alternative subjective theory which holds that the proposition "x is good" means "x is related to or involves some reference to an organism". This will in so far constitute a defense of Hartmann's theory, since objec-

tivism and subjectivism are incompatible.

In Chapter III I shall present an English view of the objectivity of value, a view which, while superior to the subjective view, must be rejected upon other grounds. I shall try to show that Hartmann's objective view, which in certain respects is incompatible with the English theory, is the more tenable of the two.

In the fourth chapter I shall consider an American objective theory of value which bears many resemblances to that of Hartmann. Since other competing theories have each in turn been rejected the issue remains between Hartmann and this last theory. If one of these can be shown to be false, the other quite likely may be true, at least nearer the truth.

In the last chapter I shall attempt to show some of the defects of Hartmann's doctrine of essences. In conclusion, I shall try to point out, what in my opinion, constitutes a truer view than that of Hartmann. Such a conclusion will, in the nature of the case, be quite tentative, but nevertheless it should be free from the falsities inherent in the previously rejected theories.

In the consideration of alternative theories we shall not attempt to consider all types of the theory in question but only such as may fairly adequately represent the defects of theories of this type. In order to narrow the field of discourse to a reasonable compass and yet cover the ground rather thoroughly it is convenient to classify the various theories.

A few decades ago it might have been considered suffic-

ient to divide philosophical theories into two camps--realism and idealism. But for modern value theory this classification does not distinguish clearly, and, indeed, involves much overlapping. The line of demarcation in ethics today is the issue of objectivity, which Professor Urban aptly calls "the Great Divide" in ethics⁴.

But within the distinction of subjective and objective, value theories may be further classified as relational and non-relational. By "relational" I mean dependent upon something else, upon the subject or upon something outside the subject or object but related to one or the other or both, or upon relations within the subject or object. By "non-relational" I mean independent, intrinsic, dependent only upon itself and the laws of its own nature. Generally speaking, a relational theory conceives of value as a complex, while a non-relational theory holds that value is a simple, indefinable quality.

Among the subjective theories we shall consider those of Professors R. B. Perry and D.H. Parker as representative.⁵ Of these, Perry's theory is generally considered subjective-relational, along with that of Professor Prall, while Parker's theory may be classed as subjective-non-relational.

Among objective theories those of F. H. Bradley, Bernard Bosanquet, and more recently, Professor W. R. Urban, as well as various biological and evolutionary theories are objective-

4. W. R. Urban, Proceedings of the Sixth International Congress of Philosophy, pp. 292-295.

5. Chapter II of this thesis.

relational--depending upon a world ground of logical or axiological totality, coherence, system, mind, or depending upon outer circumstances as in the case of evolutionary theories. In this category also belong the various personalistic theories and the view of the pragmatists. However, as these last named views bear no direct relation to those of Hartmann, we shall not include them in our discussion. As representative of the objective-relational value theory we shall consider chiefly the view of Professor Urban^{6.}, whose account of value bears many resemblances to that of Hartmann.

The theories of Professors W. D. Ross, John Laird, G. E. Moore, and Nicolai Hartmann may be classed as objective-non-relational, since for them value is independent, intrinsic,^{7.} and self sufficient. Among this group the theories of Moore^{8.} and Hartmann will receive our chief attention.

First of all, as a basis and pivotal point for our entire discussion, we shall present an exposition of Hartmann's theory of value, as it bears directly upon the issue of objectivity, particularly in relation to a definition of value. Then by means of comparison and contrast with other relevant theories we shall seek to understand and evaluate Hartmann's view in the light of current English and American philosophical thought.

6. Chapter IV of this thesis.

7. Chapter III of this thesis.

8. Chapter I and V of this thesis.

CHAPTER I
AN EXPOSITION OF HARTMANN'S VALUE THEORY

In the narrow compass of this thesis I shall not attempt to survey all of Hartmann's theory of ethics. I shall consider only that part which bears most directly upon our problem and the chief tenet of Hartmann's theory, namely, objectivity.

The first question which arises in the discussion of any theory of value is that of definition. Is value definable? and if so, what is its nature? When we know the answer to this question we can quite easily trace the implications of the entire theory. We shall therefore plunge immediately into the heart of our problem by a consideration of Hartmann's answer to this question.

In the last analysis all values are indefinable contends Hartmann. Let us quote: "One must conclude that the good is not definable--neither directly, per genus et differentiam, nor indirectly. Strictly speaking, all values are indefinable; one can at most present their material clearly and unambiguously; the special character of value as such, the specific quality, one must always leave to the living sense of values to find out. But as the sense responds specifically to each specific content, the quality of the value is thereby inseparably fused with the material. In the case of the good [the fundamental moral value] even this indirect definition is denied to us; we do not have access to its material [content].

335685

"Nor do we gain any light from the fact that many of the simpler elements of value are united in the good and are included as elements in its contents. The good is clearly not exhausted in them. In fact the character of 'moral' value remains quite untouched thereby. The good has evidently a something new in it over and above all combinations of its constituent parts, and it is just on this fact that the question turns. But the new is not accessible as regards content. The usual methods all prove too simple in this case. The nature of the good--however obvious its character may appear to the feeling for values--is highly complex as regards material. Therein lies its partial irrationality."^{1.}

I

This brings us to the unique thesis of Hartmann's value theory: Values are essences.^{2.} Philosophical theories involving essences are, of course, not altogether a novelty. Hartmann acknowledges his debt to Plato to whom he attributes the discovery of the realm of Ideal Being. Nevertheless, Hartmann's theory of value essences constitutes a distinctly different type of contribution from that of most ethical theories.

Even though values be indefinable we still can know something of their generic nature. They are essences. Let us see if we can understand what Hartmann means by value essences. He offers some explanation.

1. Ethik pp.340f. cf. pp.262ff., p.172. Translation by Stanton edit (1932) Vol. II pp.172f. cf. Op. cit pp.Tr. Vol. II pp.66ff., Vol. I p.272.

2. Op. cit pp.107ff. Tr. Vol. I pp.183ff.

The German word Wesenheit (essence) is a translation of essentia. The two mean the same thing, says Hartmann, "if we disregard the various metaphysical presuppositions which have attached themselves to the idea of essence"². Essences denote another realm of being than that of existence or of consciousness. Plato called it the realm of the Idea, Aristotle, that of the eidos, the Scholastics, the realm of essentia. "After having been long misunderstood and deprived of its right in modern times through the prevailing subjectivism, this realm has again come into recognition with relative purity in that which Phenomenology calls the realm of essence."³

"For Aristotle, of course, this 'essence' possessed a logical structure. It was thought of as the complete series of the determinant elements of a definition, or as the series of the differentiae, which, proceeding from the most general, embrace the ever narrower, down to the 'last', to the differentia specifica. The eidos, which thus arises, is then accepted as the formal substance, the complete structure. This logicism was conditioned by the identification of 'essence' with 'concept', or, more correctly, by the lack of any discrimination between them. It was this that obscured the doctrine of 'essence' even in the Middle Ages, and gave support to the attempted metaphysic of conceptual realism. From this it has

². Op. cit. p.108. Tr. Vol. I p.183. Cf. Phenomenology is intuition of essences, Wesensschauung. G. Grenau, Die Philosophie der Gegenwart, II Band (Wendt und Klawewell, Längersalza, 1922) pp.197,199, Chapter on Husserl. Cf. also Walter Ehrlich, Kant und Husserl, (Saale Verlag von Max Niemeyer, 1923) p. 75. For Husserl "essence" is identified with "meaning".