Kultura i Wartości
ISSN 2299-7806
Nr 40 (2025)

http://dx.doi.org/10.17951/kw.2025.40.47-76

The Problem of Social-Historical Being: Nonreductionism and Creation in Hartmann and Castoriadis

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Both Nicolai Hartmann and Cornelius Castoriadis were philosophers not easily classified in terms of the major schools of thought in 20th century philosophy. Both had wide-ranging interests, one of which was the problem of "spiritual being" or the "social-historical." This problem, the ontological status of social-historical phenomena, is the focus of the paper. Using a comparative, historically sensitive, analytical, and interpretive approach, we find that their discussions of it converge in their shared critique of reductionism in social theory, their proposals regarding ontological stratification, and their attribution of a unique mode of being to the social-historical. They also diverge due to the subtly different *Problemlagen* of the two writers. Castoriadis frames the issue of the social-historical with reference to the reductivist-determinist explanatory axis, and emphasizes the creativity of the social imaginary and its role in social institution. Hartmann is not immediately concerned with the determinism question due to his careful disentanglement of genesis questions and stratification questions in ontology. The result for both is that because human existence is stratified, reductionism is fruitless and the social-historical has a unique mode of being, characterized by free cultural creativity and institutionalized transmission of cultural contents.

Keywords: Nicolai Hartmann, Cornelius Castoriadis, spiritual being, social-historical, *Problemgeschichte*, problem, reductionism, stratification, ontology, creation, objectivation

> Creation […] is the mode of being of the social-historical field ….] Society is self-creation deployed as history.[1]
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> Spirit has the freedom to shape itself ….] in the individual person as in the shared spirit of the age. […] It is not a superformation of the given, but a free formative power (*freie Gestaltung*) superposing itself upon it, a creative flux (*schöpferischer Wandel*) that resembles nothing else in the world.[2]

1. *Problemgeschichte* and the Problem of Spiritual being

If the "problem of spiritual being" is an everlasting *Problemgehalt* (problem-content) like any other unavoidable philosophical problem—which is how, I suggest, we should read the term "problem" in the title to Hartmann's 1933 work *The Problem of Spiritual Being*—then we should initially regard it in light of Hartmann's own conception of the history of philosophy as a history of problems (*Problemgeschichte*). Doing so allows us to consider it from multiple historical angles, revealing its different aspects, and illuminating its enigmatic features. This article will compare a few aspects of Hartmann's discussion of the problem of spiritual being with French-Greek philosopher Cornelius Castoriadis's treatment of social-historical being, whose treatment of the problem is often strikingly similar but also markedly different in key, subtle respects. I suggest that Hartmann's discussion could be used to rectify shortcomings in Castoriadis's treatment. In this section I outline Hartmann's own framework for *Problemgeschichte.* In the next, I explain how both Hartmann and Castoriadis respond to the threat of reductionism in social theory. Following this I discuss some features of their accounts of the mode of being of the social-historical before concluding. I will use the terms "spiritual" and "social-historical" interchangeably here for reasons that will become clear below.

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[1] Cornelius Castoriadis, *World in Fragments*, ed. and trans. David A. Curtis (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 13.

[2] Nicolai Hartmann, *Das Problem des geistigen Seins: Untersuchungen zur Grundlegung der Geschichtsphilosophie und der Geisteswissenschaften* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1933), 89. Hereafter *PS*. All translations of Hartmann are my own unless otherwise noted.

Following on his publication of *The Problem of the Givenness of Reality* and *The Problem of Spiritual Being* in the early 1930s, in "Philosophical Thought and its History" (1936) Hartmann engaged in an extended methodological reflection, distinguishing between "system thinking" and "problem thinking" in the history of philosophy.[3] His metaphilosophical conception of philosophical problems likely has two direct sources: his former Marburg teacher Paul Natorp and the southwestern neo-Kantian Wilhelm Windelband. In a programmatic text that Hartmann almost certainly would have read, Natorp stated that

> "Knowing that you don't know" means the "cognition of problems." […] The great X of cognition, which we call the "object," signifies not one problem among others, but *the* problem, and guarantees, as everlasting problem, no other solution than that which consists in the perpetual progress of the whole tremendous reckoning of cognition. […] There is undoubtedly a sure progress of cognition and an unavoidable law of this progress, but of course never such a solution as would not contain within itself new, greater problems at the same time.[4]

A discussion of the phenomenon of "knowing that you don't know" forms a significant part of Hartmann's 1921 *Grundzüge einer Metaphysik der Erkenntnis*, and the key features of "problem cognition" and "cognitive progress" are prominent and decisive elements of his examination of cognitive phenomena there.[5] But he dramatically modifies their meaning in his break with neo-Kantian idealism. He agrees with Natorp that cognition bears on problems and that we make progress on them, but both the problems themselves and the progress on them point beyond themselves to a real world preceding us that we attempt to know, not a world that we create along with our knowledge of it. The "metaphysics of cognition," which his neo-Kantian teachers were unwilling to explore, overflows the strictly epistemological domain into the ontological. Against them, he argued that epistemology does not become more intelligible by being de-ontologized; it must

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[3] Nicolai Hartmann, "*Der philosophische Gedanke und seine Geschichte,*" in *Kleinere Schriften II. Abhandlungen zur Philosophie-Geschichte* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1957), 1–48.

[4] Paul Natorp, *Philosophie—Ihr Problem und ihre Probleme: Einführung in den kritischen Idealismus,* ed. Karl-Heinz Lembeck (Göttingen: Edition Ruprecht, 2008 [1911]), 35. My translation.

[5] Nicolai Hartmann, *Grundzüge einer Metaphysik der Erkenntnis* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1949 [1921]), Ch. 9, Ch. 58. Hereafter *ME.*

be re-ontologized and placed into the wider ambit of human embodiment, feeling, life, and experience in order to be understood at all.[6] It follows that cognition is one problem among many others, not the single greatest problem of philosophy, contra Natorp's claim above.

While quite critical of Windelband, Hartmann nevertheless adopts his notion that the history of philosophy should be interpreted as a "history of problems." Hartmann gives this approach far more substance than Windelband, who never quite followed through on this conception. He builds it into his epistemology, linking it to the "consciousness of problems" as a distinct feature of the total phenomenon of cognition.[7] Windelband claimed in 1914 that philosophical problems arise from disturbances that emerge from everyday "assumptions about life and science" that are "called into question and awake[n] reflection," and are shaped by "various historical circumstances that are due partly to the features of personal, and partly to the characteristics of general, intellectual life."[8] Such problems are persistent and even "inevitable," and their recurrence justifies the existence of philosophy as a historical discipline.

> If, in the end, it is always the same problems and the same general lines of solution that we find, we may see in this precisely the best title of philosophy to recognition. The fact proves that its problems are inevitable; that they are real and inescapable problems which no thoughtful intellect, once it is awakened, can succeed in ignoring. The perpetual recurrence of the same solutions of problems, which seemed at first sight to be a reproach, really shows that there are certain inevitable relations of thought to the subject-matter, and that, in spite of the constant change of the historical stimulation, they are bound to return. […] Thus both the problems and the solutions of them become intelligible as a necessary correlation of the mind and the objects it desires to know.[9]

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[6] See especially Hartmann's *Ontology: Laying the Foundations*, trans. Keith Peterson (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019 [1935]), Part 3.

[7] *ME* 6.e. For a discussion of Dilthey's and Windelband's similar conception of an "ahistorical core" of philosophy, see Katherina Kinzel's "The History of Philosophy and the Puzzles of Life: Windelband and Dilthey on the Ahistorical Core of Philosophical Thinking," in *The Emergence of Relativism: German Thought from the Enlightenment to National Socialism,* ed. Martin Kusch et al. (New York: Routledge, 2019), 26–42.

[8] Wilhelm Windelband, *An Introduction to Philosophy,* trans. Joseph McCabe (London: T. Fisher Unwin Ltd., 1914), 21–22.

[9] Ibid.

According to Hartmann, although Windelband promised such a history of problems, what he ended up with was another characterization of closed philosophical systems which unfortunately concealed the insights into problems achieved by particular thinkers.[10] He agrees with Windelband that "problems themselves have historical continuity" and that "a problem, once discovered, endures through the series of attempts to solve it, and until such time as it is really solved."[11] In order to pursue philosophical "problem thinking," which is the only reliable method we have for "advancing research in the history of philosophy,"[12] he substantively adds to Windelband's approach by distinguishing between three aspects of philosophical problems. He explains that we have the "statement of the problem" (*Problemstellung*), its particular and perhaps idiosyncratic characterization by a given author; the "current state of the problem" (*Problemlage*), more stable but contextual and shaped by historical tradition; and the "contents of the problem" (*Problemgehalt*), including its sometimes nonrational and impenetrable aspects, which may be properly "metaphysical." It is worth quoting at length:

> Human beings are the ones who first "state" problems (*Problemstellung*); they are brought up to see the current state of the problems (*Problemlage*) in a tradition, but also labor to transform this situation themselves. By no means, however, do human beings have dominion over the contents of problems (*Problemgehalt*). There is nothing in the problem contents that is a product of human artifice. The problem content is already given along with the overall structure of the world and the place of humankind in it, and something of this content can change only to the degree that the world and humankind also change in their fundamental features. The history of problems does not have to do with the problem contents (*Problemgehalt*), but only with the shifting of the current state of the problem (*Problemlage*) tied to them and the broad variance in statements of the problem (*Problemstellung*) within the latter. Problem contents persist identically, while the latter emerge or are submerged historically in unforeseeable variety.[13]

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[10] Hartmann, "*Der philosophische Gedanke und seine Geschichte*," 7–8.

[11] He continues: "But since philosophical problems are inscrutable and are not so easily brought to an actual solution, the thinking of multiple minds and whole eras is substantively bound to them." Hartmann, "*Der philosophische Gedanke und seine Geschichte*," 4.

[12] Ibid., 48.

[13] *ME* 1.b. This 1921 formula should be compared with Heidegger's remarks concerning "questions" in *Being and Time* (trans. John Macquarrie and Edward S. Robinson, New York:

Historical continuity of problems thus does not hold for "the specific ways of posing the questions (*Problemstellungen*), nor for the state of the problem (*Problemlage*) at any given time, which is proper to the state of knowledge achieved in a specific period, but for the problem contents (*Problemgehalten*)."[14] Although he says these contents are not properly historical in the previous quotation, he means that the ahistorical or transhistorical core of metaphysical problems does not depend for its existence on historical "human artifice," although we do nevertheless witness a recurrence of these very problems in experience. He continues:

> What we call the problem of the soul, of the good, of justice, of substance, is not something arbitrary, not manufactured by humankind; these are unavoidable basic questions, obtruding on us again and again, independent of any particular time and any particular interests. We can fail to see them in our own thinking, can even ignore them, carry on living without regard to them, but we cannot eliminate them from the world nor prevent them from cropping up again and again. For it is precisely the world as it is, and our life in it, which presents them to us. Humankind cannot fundamentally escape them, because it is not in their power to change the world.[15]

Hartmann says explicitly in *PS* that the nature of spiritual being is "deeply puzzling" and a "metaphysical" problem, one of these unavoidable, obtrusive problems in human experience.[16] Hartmann thoroughly examines the *Problemgehalt* of spiritual being from the perspective of his own historical *Problemlage*. In the book, Hartmann rejected the prevailing forms of "reductionism" of various types in social-historical explanation in his time, and proposed a unique categorial definition of spiritual being in history that was supported by the outline of the stratified ontology he had already developed in the mid-1920s.

Harper, 1962), section 2 of the *Introduction*. We might suggest that "formulating" the question of being is a *Problemstellung*, a historical "pre-understanding of being" is a *Problemlage*, and the necessity of the "question of the meaning of being" is a perennial *Problemgehalt* since it "belongs to the essential constitution of *Dasein* itself" (28).

[14] Hartmann, "*Der philosophische Gedanke und seine Geschichte*," 4.

[15] Ibid.

[16] *PS* iii. Provided we do not interpret "eternal" and "identical" in a Platonic way, framing the "problem" this way is harmless and productive.

Roughly four decades later, Greek-French social philosopher, economist, and psychoanalyst Cornelius Castoriadis published *The Imaginary Institution of Society* (1975), in which he also argued powerfully against reductionist tendencies in social theory and attempted to define the mode of being proper to the social-historical being of society. Castoriadis thinks that understanding the "being of the social-historical" has presented a significant problem for western philosophy because its metaphysics has primarily been focused on the being of determinate, discrete entities, rather than on process and becoming. Additionally, it has completely overlooked the nature of the "radical imagination" in human existence and social life that grounds both human autonomy and the "social imaginary significations" that structure the institution(s) of human societies. In his tracing of the vicissitudes of the problem of "determination" throughout the history of philosophy, and of the differing manifestations of the conflict between autonomy and heteronomy in political formations, he also adopts an at least analogous methodological premise—that the being of the social-historical is an enduring "problem" for philosophy. He even describes the questions that the being of the social-historical presents as "abyssal" and "infinitely enigmatic." That self-reflection is

> social-historical lays bare to our scrutiny the abyssal question of social-historical knowledge. Of course it is not our conception that produces the question. The question is there, manifest in the innumerable substantive difficulties of social-historical knowledge and hardly veiled by the various "theories" about society and history formulated by historical materialism, functionalism, structuralism, etc., as it cries loudly for recognition over the Procrustean beds on which all these theories lay their social-historical "material." Our conception simply allows us to gain, from the start, a clear vision of the infinitely enigmatic character of the question.[17]

If we simply replace occurrences of the term "question" in this passage with "problem," it sounds strikingly Hartmannian. We do not produce the problem, the phenomena do. This problem is not transparent, but contains enigmatic ("metaphysical") components. This intriguing parallel will serve as the interpretive frame around our discussion of Hartmann and Castoriadis here. Both treat the *Problemgehalt* of social-historical being from out of their own *Problemlagen*.

[17] Cornelius Castoriadis, "The Social-Historical: Mode of Being, Problems of Knowledge," in *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy,* trans. David Ames Curtis (New York: Oxford University Press), 37.

Broadly speaking, Hartmann criticized the reduction of spiritual life to the individual (naturalistic, psychological, existentialist) consciousness or its "products" as in the social sciences, or to a "hovering" Hegelian spirit-substance as in grand narrative philosophical history. Hegelianism and Marxism, philosophy of life, existentialism, and historicism had made claims to explain spiritual being in terms of their own one-sided sets of categories, and such limited explanatory strategies had to be resisted in order to better understand the nature of spiritual being itself in ontological terms. In a similar but also different way, after the rise and decline of existentialism, psychoanalysis, and (a certain) Marxism in the later 20th century, Castoriadis tried to describe the mode of being of the social-historical without relying on the categories provided by any deterministic, reductive individualist or positivist social science approach. He defended the view that the "radical imagination" and social imaginary significations played a hitherto unacknowledged meaning-giving role in social life and history, a primary role in "instituting" society itself. These similarities and differences reveal historical "shifts" in the *Problemlage* across the two authors and over decades. By "reductionism" from the perspective of Hartmann's *Problemlage*, we mean the error of *Grenzüberschreitung* in particular, the "boundary crossing" applications of a category that originates in a one domain to a target domain where it is no longer legitimately applicable or explanatory. He saw that this widespread error could only be addressed by an equally generalized response, and this response is his fully developed theory of ontological stratification. Materialist-deterministic approaches committed this error, but so also did idealist and vitalist ones. They are equally reductive in their attempt to apply a single set of categories to all of human experience. Castoriadis similarly resists "reductionism," but its meaning within his *Problemlage* is more restricted. By it he means the dominant materialist-determinist type, as do most humanistic European philosophers in the 20th century. This difference is significant, and has implications that change the shape and stakes of the problem for each.

There is a lot of convergence between Hartmann and Castoriadis on the being of the social-historical, but there is also divergence that is due, on my account, to the nature of the subtly different *Problemlagen* of the two writers and their idiosyncratic *Problemstellungen*. Hartmann is not immediately concerned with the determinism question due to his careful disentanglement of genesis questions and stratification questions in ontology. Castoriadis frames the *entire issue*

of the social-historical with reference to the genetic reductivist-determinist axis, and emphasizes the creativity of the social imaginary and its role in social institution. We can learn much from both authors about the "transhistorical" *Problemgehalt* of social-historical being, but we have to keep these different *Problemlagen* in mind. They are differently nuanced, and failure to appreciate this might lead to seeing too much similarity where it is not present. There is some overlap between these approaches and their *Problemlagen* in their shared critique of reductionism, proposals regarding ontological stratification, and attribution of a unique mode of being to the social-historical. Further comparison of these historical *Problemlagen* must be set aside for now, but this should provide a sense of the contexts from which they were working.[18]

2. Hartmann and Castoriadis on Reductionism and Stratification

Hartmann declares that there is no such thing as "hovering" (*schwebender*) spirit, and the only spirit we know is "supported" (*aufruhender*), meaning "carried" by lower ontological strata.[19] In its resting on lower strata, however, it retains its autonomy (in accord with the categorial "strata laws" explained below). He insists that everywhere we have to battle the assumption that this dependence relation entails "explanation from below." He claims that reductionism of this sort is a mere hypothesis that can never be followed through.[20] Hartmann's opposition to reductionism in social ontology precedes Castoriadis' by decades, and is

[18] We might think that *Problemgeschichte* has been philosophically refuted and surpassed by authors such as Gadamer, who took it to be the dominant approach to be opposed by the new hermeneutics. On closer examination, the claims with which Gadamer opposes *Problemgeschichte* are simply the same weak anthropocentric assumptions that many antirealists use to oppose any sort of realism. For a discussion of Gadamer's case against Hartmann, see Hannes Kerber, "Der Begriff der Problemgeschichte und das Problem der Begriffsgeschichte: Gadamers vergessene Kritik am Historismus Nicolai Hartmanns," *International Yearbook for Hermeneutics* 2016, no. 15: 294–314. For more on Hartmann's contribution to a critique of antirealism and to new realism, see Keith Peterson, "Nicolai Hartmann and Recent Realisms," *Axiomathes* 27, no. 2 (2017): 161–174.

[19] *PS* 59–60.

[20] *PS* 61.

explicitly articulated in his theory of categories and ontological strata laws. These are summarized in the following paragraphs.

Put briefly, four main strata of reality are distinguished by Hartmann: the inanimate, the biological, the psychic or mental, and the spiritual. This last includes all social-historical phenomena (language, customs, tradition, law, art, institutions, etc.). The underlying observation is that the structure and the laws of history and other spiritual processes are different from the structure and laws of, for example, inanimate beings, but the former are not in any way less real than the latter.[21] The same applies to the other strata as well: biological and psychological processes are as real as any other process, and they have their own specific groups of categories. Ontology must be pluralistic, rather than monistic or dualistic. Hartmann realized as early as 1926 that he needed to formally characterize the regularities that describe the relations of strata to one another, or "strata laws."[22]

The two basic relations between strata are termed relations of superformation (*Überformung*) and superposition (*Überbauung*).[23] Consider the superformation between molecules and cells, i.e., between the physical and the biological levels of reality. It accounts for the fact that even if organisms are unquestionably more complex than nonliving mechanisms, the behavior of organisms is in conformity with laws of mechanics.[24] At the same time, mechanical regularities are superformed by being incorporated into organic ones. The relation between the psychic and spiritual levels is different, because they are characterized by an interruption in the categorial series and by the onset of a new categorial coherence. The relations between the biological and the psychic stratum, on the one hand, and the relation between the psychic and the spiritual stratum, on the other, are both relations of superposition. The group of categories embedded in psychological entities is different from the group of categories embedded in biological

[21] Nicolai Hartmann, *Der Aufbau der realen Welt: Grundriss der allgemeinen Kategorienlehre* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1940), A 20.a. Hereafter *A* followed by relevant chapters and sections, since Hartmann organized his books into short chapters subdivided into sections usually no longer than two or three pages.

[22] Nicolai Hartmann, "Kategoriale Gesetze," *Philosophischer Anzeiger* 1926, no. 1: 201–266.

[23] *A* 51.f. Superposition is the default strata-relation and never applies to objects, while superformation can be used to describe relations in a scalar hierarchy between objects (e.g., whole-part) as well as relations between strata categories.

[24] *A* 51.b.

entities completely lacking mental life (such as plants). Similarly, the group of categories embedded in spiritual entities is different from the group of categories embedded in psychic entities.

There are four groups of laws that govern the various levels of reality and their connection.[25] The "laws of validity" concern the scope of the validity of categorial principles,[26] and the "laws of coherence" concern the holistic character of each stratum.[27] If we take a simple organism as object of inquiry, for example, biological categories rather than physical or mental ones are primarily valid, and these saturate the organism with specifically organological forms of determination, no more (such as teleology) and no less (such as physical causality). Moreover, if we claim that "metabolism" belongs to a proper understanding of the organism, then aspects of every other category of organic life are entailed in it as well, codetermining and ingredient in it. With these two sets of principles, he has covered the internal coherence and determination within a stratum. These laws together imply a degree of incommensurability of categorial domains to one another, but given the all-pervasiveness of the "fundamental" categories (such as principle-concretum or element-complex), this substantive incommensurability is never total. Relations between different strata are captured in the last two sets of structural laws, and bear directly on the issue of reductionism.

The "laws of stratification" can be summed up in four key terms: recurrence, modification, novelty, and distance. Some lower categories recur in higher strata as partial aspects of higher categories, and every recurring category is modified in its recurrence. Whenever a lower element is taken into the higher it is affected by its new place in relation to others in the new stratum. These two principles constitute a vertical interconnectedness of the strata. While the categories of causality and substance, for example, appear to us initially in discussion of physical things, they recur modified in the domain of the organic. Because categories

[25] For a short introduction, see *New Ways of Ontology,* trans. Reinhard C. Kuhn (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1953). For a further commentary on the laws, see Keith Peterson, "An Introduction to Nicolai Hartmann's Critical Ontology," *Axiomathes* 22, no. 3 (2012): 291–314. For a broader discussion, see Keith Peterson, Roberto Poli "Nicolai Hartmann," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2022 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2022/entries/nicolai-hartmann/ (accessed 21.12.2025).

[26] *A* 43.a.

[27] *A* 45.b.

are not simples but complexes of factors, some of those factors may remain stable while others are modified, constituting the recurrence of the same but non-identical category. These recurrences have to be shown in each case, and one of the tasks of categorial analysis is tracing the modifications of a single category throughout the strata. Next, every stratum contains its own unique and novel categories that are not present in the lower stratum, nor are they a sum of them. Finally, recurrence, modification, and novelty imply that there is not a continuous series of levels, but gaps or breaks between them. The last two laws of novelty and distance are what give the impression of the ontological irreducibility of the strata.[28] For instance, while the category of metabolism in the organic may necessarily incorporate some aspects of linear causal process, it is itself a distinctive kind of process that is irreducible to them. Thus, recurrence and novelty respectively reflect the aspects of continuity and discontinuity among the strata. Categorial novelty inserts an incision or cut into the apparent continuum of categories, creating a distance or gap between strata. The "laws of dependence" can also be summed up in four terms: strength, indifference, matter, and freedom. The "fundamental categorial law" of strength says that the lower categories on which higher strata depend are conditions or fundaments, while the higher are weaker. The lower are indifferent to whether anything higher builds on them or not, since their vocation is not to serve the higher. As "matter," the lower categories, if incorporated into higher levels, constrain what the higher may do with them but do not determine it. Lastly, the higher always has leeway despite its weakness and dependence on the lower.[29] Laws of dependence help to characterize superposition relations. They organize the order of the strata, so that the spiritual level is founded on the psychological level, which in its turn is founded on the biological one. Conversely, the biological level is the bearer of the psychological level and the latter is the bearer of the spiritual level. This conception of ontological strata and their regularities was already worked out by Hartmann in 1926 and obviously plays a role in his critique of reductionism in 1933.

Entities in the higher strata are more complex, but this does not mean that they are a composite made up of elements from the lower strata.[30] This goes for

[28] *A* 50.b.

[29] *A* 55.d.

[30] Complex entities are "wholes *sui generis* that cannot be understood otherwise than through themselves" (*PS* 61).

all strata, but especially spirit. Spirit takes up only certain determinations from the lower strata as it "rests" on them, and it does not follow from this that spirit is "nothing but" these determinations. The metaphysically dualistic attempt to reduce spirit to either "God or Matter" is overcome once we see that in experience we only know dependence and independence together. We have to reject the common assumption that something can be either *dependent* or *autonomous,* but not both at once. This mistake often results when we make autonomy synonymous with separateness or "ab-soluteness," and we make dependence synonymous with "compositeness." Hartmann's strata laws show that something can be carried by something else without being composed of it, or explicable in terms of what it is made of, just as something can be independent in some respect, but also interconnected with other things.[31] Stratified ontology performs a great service here: "We are dealing with the world as it is, with a varyingly organized graduated order of ontological strata in which there is a very specific intertwining of dependence and autonomy from stratum to stratum, not with an alternative between 'God or Matter.' In this graduated series there is no 'omnipotence' of one ontological stratum—whether a higher or a lower stratum."[32]

Against the backdrop of this elaborate stratified ontology, Hartmann is better able than others preceding him to adequately capture the novel mode of being of social-historical life and tradition, avoiding reductionisms that generalize one set of categories over all others. Categorial ontology, stratification, and the meta-relations of superposition and superformation block this reduction.[33] Spirit is supported but not determined by all of the lower strata, "a free formative power superposing itself above" the inorganic, organic, and psychic strata.

Hartmann goes on to define spirit as a unity of three interconnected aspects that different approaches often isolate and mistake for the whole: "personal," "objective," and "objectivized" spirit. According to him, the naive eye takes only persons to be real; the discipline of history sees the objective spirit or culture of the

[31] "Autonomy is not separateness (absoluteness), and being-carried is not to be composed out of that which is doing the carrying" (*PS* 63–64).

[32] *PS* 65–66.

[33] For example, "the autonomy of the psychic above the organic is of another kind and order of magnitude than that of the organic over the material. We can call this relation 'superposition,' in contrast to superformation" (*PS* 66–68).

era; while the social sciences only see the "works" of spirit.[34] "Personal spirit" is real, living, and individual, while "objective spirit" is real, living, and superindividual. "Objectivized spirit," or a specific entity with cultural significance, is mostly "irreal" and "for us" in terms of content, is nonliving, and superindividual, and only this kind of spirit can appear to be timeless and transhistorical.[35] These three aspects are a concrete unity, and their superposition on lower strata is the same, even though the "autonomy" of each in its dependence on the lower has to be understood differently.[36] Hartmann and Castoriadis agree that what is considered the "individual" is a product of both socialization and self-creation.[37] Similarly, objectivized spirit is always part of a living historical tradition, its own or another. Spirit is thus always social-historical for Hartmann.[38] I think we are justified in using Castoriadis' term "social-historical" and Hartmann's term "spirit" interchangeably given these definitions.

According to Hartmann, all ontological strata are embedded in the same real time stream, and everything in time is a process.[39] Individual and objective spirit have the character of spontaneous change, process, and self-creation.[40] Contra the idea of "hovering" spirit, "nothing characterizes living spirit more fundamentally than its being-within (*Drinstehen*) or being embedded in

[34] *PS* 78.

[35] *PS* 72–73.

[36] *PS* 76–77.

[37] "What is stupidly called in political, philosophical, and economic theory the 'individual'—and which is opposed there to society—is nothing other than the society itself. [...] Socialization is therefore constitutive of the human being" (Castoriadis, *World in Fragments*, 187). According to Hartmann, the person is the kind of thing that "has to make itself what it is" through effortful self-creation. The self is not a given but an achievement in a given social-historical context (*PS* 103–104).

[38] "Objective spirit is the bearer of history in the strict and primary sense; it is only this which 'has a history.' Only it is superindividual and shared, but at the same time real and living spirit. Its alterations and destinies are historical alteration and historical destiny. It shares temporality and impermanence, as do all living things (even the spiritless), as does living personal spirit. Its life simply plays out at another tempo. The large-scale tempos are historical ones" (*PS* 73).

[39] *PS* 81–87.

[40] Spirit "stands in the thick of life's stresses," and the world "in which spirit lives and dies, this world of stress and the seriousness of life, is already the spiritual world" (*PS* 99).

(*Eingebettetsein*) the one real world,"[41] for it only becomes what it is through its development in the world.[42] Hartmann emphasizes orienting oneself in a world not made for you, a single world bound together by time and process, in which spirit has to become what it is through resistance and struggle.[43] Historical processes impact the present in different ways. One is through the direct survival of the objective (living) spirit (as "instituting"), another through the preservation of objectivized ("instituted") contents.[44] More on this distinction in the next section.

Castoriadis also rejects reductionism in social-historical explanation, but the real enemy for Castoriadis is always "determinism" in social explanation. Analogous to Heidegger's critique of the "metaphysics of presence" that allegedly dominates the history of western philosophy, Castoriadis claims that for the entire western tradition an obsession with "determination" in general is the cardinal sin. What is indeterminate—such as the *apeiron,* psychic flux, imagination, social meanings—has never been adequately captured by traditional categories or "ensemblistic-identitarian logic," he claims.[45] Moreover, Castoriadis' work aims to reconnect society with its history, and he criticizes various positions which hold that the "social" and the "historical" can be treated separately (hence the term "social-historical").

An interesting difference arising out of their common concern to define the mode of being of the social-historical, but differently shaped by their different *Problemlagen*, should be considered in this context. Where Hartmann uses the term "resting on" to describe the superposition of the social-historical on lower ontological strata, Castoriadis explicitly defines the relation that the social-historical has to "the first natural stratum" (including the inorganic, organic, and

[41] *PS* 98.

[42] *PS* 98.

[43] *PS* 99.

[44] *PS* 484.

[45] See, for instance, Cornelius Castoriadis, *Crossroads in the Labyrinth,* trans. and eds. Kate Soper and Martin H. Ryle (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1984), 145–228. Hartmann does not have this preoccupation because he distinguished many different real and ideal "forms of determination," and he rejected the simplistic dualistic Romantic opposition between mechanism and organism, opting instead for ontological pluralism. Castoriadis' simple opposition between determinacy and indeterminacy perpetuates the Romantic model. Suzi Adams discusses the Romantic influences on Castoriadis in *Castoriadis's Ontology: Being and Creation* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011).

human being considered as an organism) as "leaning on" (*Anlehnung*). The social-historical is "supported and induced" by the lower stratum. This is a key feature of his resistance to reductionist and deterministic explanations.

While there is no evidence of a direct appropriation of Hartmann's theory of strata by Castoriadis (Hartmann is never cited), passages from some of Castoriadis' works however strangely mirror Hartmann's language almost exactly. We know, he says, "that there is no *genuine* bridge running from the physicochemical to the living being, nor from the living being to the psychical and to the social-historical," and that "rupture and heterogeneity are lodged at the very heart of the citadel."[46] Such parallels are enticing and worth pursuing. But Castoriadis' specific term for this relation derives from Freud.

Castoriadis draws the term *Anlehnung* from Freud's characterization of the relation between somatic and psychological drives.[47] In that historical problem-context, it is a question of whether psychological drives are causally determined by somatic ones. Castoriadis sees in Freud's discussion an occasion for insisting on the nondeterministic relation between the somatic and psychical, and thus, for emphasizing the role of the creative unconscious or imagination. But he also proceeds to use the term more broadly. According to Klooger, he "utilizes the concept of leaning on particularly in connection with the relationship between social-historical phenomena and those in what he calls the first natural stratum," where "the social-historical leans on nature, taking up and utilizing in a creative, non-deterministic manner that which is given."[48] Castoriadis says, for example, that "the identification and obtaining of food is a universal problem for humans as for all organisms," but "the definition and meaning of food, the division into edible and inedible and the significance of each and the relationship between [them] and other social institutions and significations, depend on a creativity that can never be predicted or explained in a deterministic manner."[49] Castoriadis also uses the

[46] Castoriadis, *World in Fragments,* 364–365.

[47] Jeff Klooger, "*Anlehnung* (Leaning on)," In *Cornelius Castoriadis: Key Concepts,* ed. Suzi Adams (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 128–129.

[48] Klooger, "*Anlehnung* (Leaning on)," 129.

[49] Ibid., 130. Klooger rightly recognizes that in this usage, "excluding determinism only answers the question of what leaning on is not." It requires more nuance: "what happens when phenomena in the biological stratum lean on the physical is not the same as what happens when social-historical phenomena lean on the psyche. We need to ask what it means in each case for

term with clearer reference to stratification. In a passage that could almost be summarizing Hartmann, Klooger says that

> Castoriadis regards the universe as ontologically stratified, with different strata corresponding to different modes of being with their own laws and their own types of law […] The laws of one stratum do not rule beyond that stratum, and thus do not determine the phenomena within other strata. So, purely physical laws do not determine biological phenomena, biological laws do not determine psychical phenomena, and psychical laws do not determine social-historical phenomena. Instead, relationships flowing from lower to higher strata are to be understood as instances of leaning on, with creation intervening between and at the same time bridging the strata.[50]

Although this sounds shockingly similar, we also should not be misled by superficially similar ways of speaking. As said above, in terms of his enveloping *Problemlage* and distinct *Problemstellung*, Castoriadis' work is largely motivated by his resistance to deterministic approaches in the social sciences, and his insistence on creativity in living beings and social life. This broadly Romantic impulse frames his whole philosophy and is characteristic of the *Problemlage* of mid-20th century humanistic philosophy. It is a response to the dominant Modernist dualistic model in ontology. Hartmann convincingly showed that pluralism is a far better response to Modernist dualism than monism. Hartmann saw through the artificiality of this opposition and aimed to include all ontological categories and strata in a pluralistic analysis.

Castoriadis' definition of the "first natural stratum" and its "ensidic" dimension should therefore be interpreted in light of his preoccupation with determination: "there exists a stratum of natural being [*l'étant naturel*] that is organiz*able*, sufficiently so for the living being to exist therein; and the essential part of the organization that the living being imposes (or constructs) upon this stratum is ensemblistic-identitary [or set-theoretical]—*ensidic*, for short. I call this

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an element of a lower stratum to be leaned on by the organism, by the psyche and by the social-historical" (131–132). Hartmann's strata laws regarding categorial relations can ostensibly help to illuminate and clarify these different types of relations.

[50] With reference to Castoriadis' *Crossroads in the Labyrinth*, 145–226, and *World in Fragments,* 342–373.

stratum, with the living being included therein, the 'first natural stratum.'"[51] The Kant-inspired postulate that the organization of the environment stems from the organism as center, which Castoriadis draws from Franciso Varela, is obvious here. It is even more clear when he says

> leaning on an organizable—that is to say, ensidizable—being-thus of nonliving nature, the living being self-creates itself [*s'autocrée*] as living being by creating in the same stroke a world, its world, the living world *for it*. [...] The living being creates new forms, and, first of all, creates itself [*se crée*] qua *form* or rather *superform* that integrates, and deploys itself in, an innumerable multiplicity of categorial forms specific to the living being (nutrition, metabolism, homeostasis, reproduction, sexuation, etc.).[52]

While the closing list of "categorial forms specific to the living being" also sounds strikingly Hartmannian, everything preceding it resonates with "self-organization" or "autopoiesis" theories stemming from the "world-making" theories popularized by Jacob von Uexküll. More importantly, he also uses the term "leaning on" to name the relation between the social-historical and the first natural stratum.

> The institution of society occurs [*se fait*], *also*, through reconstitution of an explicit ensidic (ensemblistic-identitary) dimension. […] This reconstitution leans on the being-thus of the first natural stratum—though it is far from 'reproducing' purely and simply, and even from reproducing at all, the ensidic logic of the living being. For, it should be pointed out, the ensidic dimension of society is, each time, decisively codetermined by what, in the institution of this society, *is not* ensidic: the properly imaginary, or poietic, dimension.[53]

Castoriadis's careful circumscription of an "ensidic" dimension in living and social worlds is his way of giving some credit to reductionist, "functionalist" types of social theory. These theories do capture the behavior of some organic and social phenomena, but they always exclude whatever does not fit into their deterministic set-theoretical categories. Given this emphasis, Castoriadis seems to be focused on genetic (causal) relations and mostly granular conceptions of entities, while

[51] Castoriadis, *World in Fragments,* 350.

[52] Ibid., 351.

[53] Ibid., 354–355.

Hartmann is concerned with whole categorial strata and their vertical relations.[54] Castoriadis distinguishes ensidic-functional from creative-nonfunctional features, while Hartmann would characterize this difference in terms of categorial strata and theoretical "standpoints" rather than determinacy and indeterminacy. Castoriadis is engaged in the old romantic battle over mechanism and organism, determinism and creativity. He circumscribes the limited validity of the ensidic, but claims a bigger role for social-historical creativity beyond the merely functional. Hartmann would have likely set aside this dispute as artificial. There are many forms of determination, not one or two, and there is no grand opposition between mechanism and creativity. He has no need to resist mechanistic "determinism" because it is so self-evidently false provided we perform a proper categorial analysis of the real world.

In later work aimed at a reform of science-philosophy relations, Castoriadis began to formulate a pluralistic, categorial ontology, and he even defined what to Hartmann is the single greatest error of various forms of explanation in philosophy and the sciences (*Grenzüberschreitung*): "the vain attempt to transpose to [one] region concepts and schemas [i.e., categories] that are valid only in other regions."[55] Hartmann's work can provide a corrective and clarification to Castoriadis' thought when it comes to the relations between the social-historical and other ontological strata. Alternatively, we could say that their approaches can be seen as illuminating two aspects of the same dependence relation: Hartmann emphasizes the ontological dependence of the higher on the lower, while Castoriadis emphasizes the creativity and indeterminacy of the higher beyond the ensidic features of the lower (what Hartmann called the categorial "novum").

3. Hartmann and Castoriadis on the Mode of Being of the Social-Historical

Both authors not only resist reductionism in sociological and historical investigations, but also characterize the unique mode of being of the social-

[54] See Keith Peterson's "Flat, Hierarchical, and Stratified: Determination and Dependence in Social-Natural Ontology," in *New Research on the Philosophy of Nicolai Hartmann*, eds. Keith Peterson and Roberto Poli (Berlin: De Gruyter. 2016), 109–131 for a discussion of this important distinction in Hartmann's work.

[55] Castoriadis, *Crossroads in the Labyrinth,* 220.

historical. Both identify it primarily as a creative power, and its creation is recognized to be two-sided: there is the living (objective) or "instituting" side and the objectivized or "instituted" side. According to Hartmann,

> spirit has the freedom to shape itself [….] in the individual person as in the shared spirit of the age. That which grows into uniqueness and grandeur is always one of a kind and never returns. It is not a superformation of the given, but a free formative power (*freie Gestaltung*) superposing itself upon it, a creative flux (*schöpferischer Wandel*) that resembles nothing else in the world.[56]

The relations of superformation and superposition are explicitly distinguished here, and reaffirm the nondeterministic relation between strata. Positively, this capacity of the living (objective) spirit to create forms Hartmann calls "objectivation." "Objectivation is in a certain sense the opposite of [epistemic] objectification" according to Hartmann. "Objectification is grasping, receptivity, perception, conception," while "objectivation is spontaneity, a creating, bringing something into the world."[57] These creations or "objectivations are entities created by spirit in which spirit expresses itself and makes itself real. […] In objectivation […] something that did not exist before […] is made to exist for the first time. In objectification living spirit is only receptive, in objectivation it is creative."[58] Although Hartmann does not everywhere identify this creation with imagination, he certainly does so when talking about artworks as objectivized social-historical objects in his *Aesthetics*.[59] Creativity is also a characteristically human capacity: "In its creativity, humankind possesses the power to experiment with unknown forms beyond those created by nature—to posit them next to and above what is natural."[60]

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[56] *PS* 89.

[57] *PS* 118.

[58] *PS* 407. Natorp also used the term "objectivation": "Only humankind builds its own human essence and, by objectivating itself therein, imprints in the deepest and most completely unified manner the character of its spirit onto its world." Paul Natorp, "Kant and the Marburg School," In *The Neo-Kantian Reader,* trans. Frances Bottenberg, ed. Sebastian Luft (New York: Routledge, 2015), 182.

[59] Nicolai Hartmann, *Aesthetics*, trans. Eugene Kelly (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014).

[60] Ibid., 440.

For Castoriadis, creation is always the work of the imagination in its various forms. The "radical imagination" in its most basic form is "the capacity to posit that which is not, to see in something that which is not there." "This imaging must be presupposed everywhere the for-itself exists, therefore beginning with the living being in general. The living being makes an image (a 'perception') be where X is."[61] Human being's language capacities "lean on" this fundamental capacity: "these [language] capacities presuppose the faculty of *quid pro quo*, of seeing something where there is something else, for example in the ability to 'see' a monkey in the five phonemes and six letters of this word, but also not always seeing the same thing, therefore in the ability to understand the expression 'I've got a monkey on my back.'"[62] At a higher level, "institutions and social imaginary significations are creations of the radical social instituting imaginary. This imaginary is the creative capacity of the anonymous collectivity, which is clearly manifest, for example, in the creation and evolution of language, family forms, mores, ideas, and so forth."[63] For both thinkers, there are two sides to this creation: the creative living spirit, and the cultural social-historical product created.

In Hartmann's terms, once it has been produced by a living spirit, objectivized content is functionally independent of the spirit that created it.[64] It is "anonymized" for Castoriadis. Living language is a kind of objectivation that is still dependent on the living spirit, while genuine objectivations are autonomous from

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[61] Castoriadis, *World in Fragments,* 151. Compare Hartmann's account in *ME* of the construction of the cognitive image: "In the cognitive relation, the subject is related primarily to objects as receptive. This does not necessarily mean passive. Its grasp of the object can also contain spontaneity. But this does not extend to the object, it bears on the image in the subject. In the construction of the image, i.e., in its own 'objective' content, consciousness can very well be creative. […] The subject does not at all determine the object, but the object determines the subject. Receptivity toward the object and spontaneity toward the image are not mutually exclusive" (*ME* 48). Whether we should call this creative aspect of cognition "imagination," as Castoriadis would, is another question, but its central role in Hartmann's epistemology is undeniable.

[62] Castoriadis, *World in Fragments,* 151. Again, compare *ME*: "In the cognizing subject the phenomenon of cognitive progress discloses, at the same time, a moment of genuine, active dynamism, a specific *cognitive spontaneity of consciousness*. […] It is not a spontaneity toward what is grasped, but only spontaneity in constructing an image of what is grasped" (*ME* 55).

[63] Castoriadis, *World in Fragments,* 131.

[64] *PS* 410.

it. Two criteria distinguish dependent from independent objectivations: the latter have a link to a stable material substrate and genuine cultural "significance."[65] Examples of objectivized cultural goods are the products of literature, poetry, plastic arts, music, monuments, buildings, technical objects, tools, weapons, useful things, craft and industrial products, but also everything ever written, scientific and philosophical worldviews, myths, religious intuitions, etc. In short, these are the physical or inscribed contents of culture. All of it survives in a living spirit, but living spirit has a different mode of historical being than the objectivized contents.[66]

Castoriadis also terminologically recognizes the distinction between living and objectivized spirit, or "instituting" and "instituted," and names the living maxtrix from which a definite social organization arises a "magma." The whole social-historical field is the

> immensely complex web of meanings that permeate, orient, and direct the whole life of the society considered [i.e., objective spirit], as well as the concrete individuals that bodily constitute the society [i.e., personal spirit]. This web of meanings is what I call the 'magma' of social imaginary significations that are carried by and embodied in the institution of the given society [i.e., objectivized spirit] and that, so to speak, animate it.[67]

This living spirit, or creative social imaginary, "is primarily a magma of social imaginary significations that make collective and individual life meaningful." This is its living, creative aspect. At the same time, "socialization is nothing other than the entry into—and the functioning of—this instituted magma of social significations."[68] This is its objectivized, created side.

> Such social imaginary significations are, for instance: spirits, gods, God; *polis*, citizen, nation, state, party; commodity, money, capital, interest rate; taboo, virtue, sin; and so forth. But such are also man/woman/child, as they are specified in a given society; beyond sheer anatomical or biological definitions, man, woman, and child

[65] *PS* 413.

[66] *PS* 417.

[67] Castoriadis, *World in Fragments,* 7.

[68] Cornelius Castoriadis, *Figures of the Thinkable* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2007), 371.

> are what they are by virtue of the social imaginary significations which make them that.[69]

Castoriadis summarily distinguishes between the living process of making social existence and the products of that process this way: "Creation, as the work of the social imaginary, of the *instituting* society (*societas institituans,* not *societas instituta*), is the mode of being of the social-historical field, by means of which this field *is*. Society is self-creation deployed as history."[70]

For both authors, the sphere of shared objectivized contents pre-exists us as individuals and we are raised to maturity within it. Culture is something that the individual must cope with and is bigger than him or her.[71] According to Hartmann, these contents also include logical laws, alogical words and concepts, vital and practical norms and values, goals and feelings, facial expressions and gestures, basically everything that belongs to a "tradition" or culture.[72] "Every expression, every word, every gesture, every act of the individual is already an objectivation."[73] He is not only talking about artworks, but all regular features of socio-historical life.

Somewhat differently, Castoriadis discusses instituting society as the creation of a unique *eidos*:

> This creation is an ontological genesis, the positing of an *eidos*: for what is posited in this way, established, instituted each time, although it is always carried by the concrete materiality of acts and things, goes beyond this concrete materiality and any particular *this*, and is a *type* permitting the indefinite reproduction of its instances, which can exist in general and as what they are only as instances of this type. A specific tool (*teukhos*)—knife, adze, hammer, wheel, boat—is such a type, a created *eidos*. So, too, is a word (*lexis*), as are marriage, purchase and sale, enterprise, temple, school, book, inheritance, election, painting.[74]

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[69] Castoriadis, *World in Fragments*, 7.

[70] Ibid., 13.

[71] *PS* 188–189.

[72] *PS* 178–181.

[73] *PS* 411.

[74] Cornelius Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Cambridge: Polity Press), 180–181.

Similarly, the internal distinction of social domains, not only objectivized objects, is itself also the work of creation: "Thus, the articulation of society into technique, economy, law, politics, religion, art, etc. which seems self-evident to us, is only one mode of social institution, particular to a series of societies to which our own belongs."[75] Castoriadis is especially concerned to emphasize the novel nature of such creations, claiming that they cannot "be inductively inferred from the forms of social life observed up to now, deduced *a priori* by theoretical reflection, or thought within a logical framework that is given once and for all."[76] These typical theoretical maneuvers refuse to "conceive of the self-deployment of an entity as the positing of new terms of an articulation and of new relations between these terms, hence as the positing of a new organization, of a new form, of another *eidos*."[77] This shows again his preoccupation with the problematic of determination and novelty, or the genetic axis of a granular series.

Hartmann goes into greater detail than Castoriadis to describe the two sides of such objectivations and their relations. Objectivized spirit is always tied to a real entity, and both the material and the "irreal" sides are historical and perishable.[78] The irreal meaning (background) depends on the material (foreground) in a stratified way, where the third element, the living spirit, is *required* by the content for completion and "fills in" between the two, recreating the "real" stratified order in the world.[79] The paradoxical concurrence of dependence and independence referred to at the start of this article is explicitly handled here. The *independent* mode of being of objectivized spirit is *dependent* at all times on this third factor, the living spirit that receives and re-cognizes it.[80] The irreal background content always has only an "appearance-character," a "being for us." Thus, three things make up objectivized spirit: a material bearer, a spiritual content, and a living spirit as reciprocally conditioning factors. While objectivized spirit may be detached from the spirit that created it (anonymized), it is not detached from "living spirit in general," since it always requires a receiver.[81]

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[75] Ibid.
[76] Ibid.
[77] Ibid.
[78] *PS* 447–448.
[79] *PS* 450, 453.
[80] *PS* 451.
[81] *PS* 453–454.

Castoriadis seems to generalize this model to cover all of the things with "social imaginary significations" that constitute a cultural, social-historical world. As the above passage averred, what counts as "man" or "child" in a given cultural world is an (irreal) social imaginary signification (meaning-for-us) as well as a natural-organic anatomical carrier of this meaning. It is the third factor, the living person-in-culture who actively perceives material entities with their respective irreal significances, or conjoins bodies with already-existing social imaginary significations that are culturally normative. The same three-part model seems to be at work. In sum, Castoriadis says that "social things"

> "incarnate" or, better, figure and presentify, social significations. Social things are what they are depending on the significations they figure, immediately or mediately, directly or indirectly. […] Reciprocally, social imaginary significations exist in and through "things"— objects and individuals—which presentify and figure them, directly or indirectly, immediately or mediately. They can exist only through their "incarnation," their "inscription," their presentation and figuration in and through a network of individuals and objects, which they "inform"—these are at once concrete entities and instances or copies of types, of *eide*—individuals and objects which exist in general and are as they are only through these significations.[82]

The terms "incarnate," "figure," and "presentify" seem to be variants of what Hartmann means by "objectivize." What was called by Hartmann the mediating "third element," a living spirit, the instituting spirit, is considered by Castoriadis to be that which has always escaped the notice of theorists, and even is in principle invisible from within a given social world. "What escapes [the institution of society] is the very being of society as instituting, that is to say, ultimately, society as the source and origin of otherness or perpetual self-alteration [which is] generally is not known as such."[83] It's being is the being of historical process, of perpetual self-alteration. "As instituting as well as instituted, society is intrinsically history—namely, self-alteration."[84]

To sum up, personal spirit or the socialized individual, objective living spirit or the social instituting imaginary, and objectivized spirit or instituted social things are all "real" social-historical entities and processes for Hartmann and

[82] Castoriadis, *Imaginary Institution of Society*, 355–356.

[83] Ibid., 370–371, 372.

[84] Ibid., 371.

Castoriadis. The last of these has largely "irreal" meaning-contents (significations) always linked to the minds of socialized perceivers, significations which emerge from a "magma" of social imaginary significations but which remain tied to a material substrate on which they "lean," and which "incarnates" them. Both authors attribute a unique mode of being to the social-historical in three fundamental aspects, even with different emphases due to their characteristically different *Problemlagen*.

4. Conclusion

Hartmann and Castoriadis address the enduring problem of social being in similar ways. They are both concerned about reductionism in social theory, but Hartmann is not concerned with the determinism question due to his careful disentanglement of genesis questions and stratification questions in ontology. He wants to avoid both materialist and idealist exaggerations, and to accurately capture the unique mode of being of spirit in its threefold nature. Castoriadis frames the whole issue of the social-historical being with reference to the genetic reductivist-determinist axis, and emphasizes the creativity of the social imaginary and its role in social institution. Castoriadis is particularly against "ensidic," functionalist social-science reductionism that has tends toward determinism about social-historical life. To such determinism he always opposes the creative imagination in some form. We can learn much from both authors about the transhistorical *Problemgehalt* of social-historical being, but we have to keep their different *Problemlagen* in mind. Acknowledging these differences is the responsible thing to do in terms of Hartmann's own problem-historical approach to the history of thought. They are differently nuanced, and failure to appreciate this might lead to seeing too much similarity where it is not present. There is some overlap between these approaches in their shared critique of reductionism, proposals regarding ontological stratification, and attribution of a unique mode of being to the social-historical. While they differ in terms of emphasis and terminology, the way that the bodies of thought of these two maverick thinkers resonate across decades provides provocative food for further thought about ontological stratification and the mode of being of the social-historical.

Reflection on the problem of the social-historical might give rise to the question whether and how this "problem" might itself be considered to be an objectivized content, a social thing "for us," but also something real enigmatically escaping our grasp and outrunning our cognitive schemes. The reader will have to be satisfied with their own response to this question for now.

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Streszczenie

Problem bytu społeczno-historycznego: nonredukcjonizm i kreatywność u Hartmanna i Castoriadisa

Zarówno Nicolai Hartmann, jak i Cornelius Castoriadis byli filozofami, których niełatwo zaklasyfikować do głównych szkół filozoficznych XX wieku. Obaj mieli szerokie zainteresowania, a jednym z nich był problem „bytu duchowego" lub „bytu społeczno-historycznego". Problem ten, tj. ontologiczny status zjawisk społeczno-historycznych, jest głównym tematem niniejszego artykułu. Stosując uwzględniające kontekst historyczny podejście porównawcze, jak

również podejście analityczne i interpretacyjne, stwierdzam, że dyskusje obu filozofów na ten temat zbiegają się w wspólnej krytyce redukcjonizmu w teorii społecznej, w ich propozycjach dotyczących stratyfikacji ontologicznej oraz w przypisaniu temu, co społeczno-historyczne, swoistego sposobu bycia. Ale też różnią się ze względu na subtelne rozbieżności w ujmowaniu *Problemlagen*. Castoriadis ujmuje to, co społeczno-historyczne w kontekście redukcjonistyczno-deterministycznej osi wyjaśniania i podkreśla kreatywność wyobraźni społecznej oraz jej rolę w instytucjach społecznych. Hartmann nie zajmuje się bezpośrednio kwestią determinizmu ze względu na to, że starannie rozdziela w ontologii problem genezy i budowy warstwowej. Obaj uzyskują wynik, że redukcjonizm jest jałowy, gdyż egzystencja ludzka ma strukturę warstwową, a sfera społeczno-historyczna ma swoisty sposób bycia, charakteryzujący się wolną twórczością kulturową oraz zinstytucjonalizowanym przekazywaniem treści kulturowych.

Słowa kluczowe: Nicolai Hartmann, Cornelius Castoriadis, byt duchowy, sfera społeczno-historyczna, Problemgeschichte, problem, redukcjonizm, układ warstwowy, ontologia, kreatywność, obiektywacja

Zusammenfassung

Das Problem des sozio-historischen Seins: Nicht-Reduktionismus und Schöpfung bei Hartmann und Castoriadis

Sowohl Nicolai Hartmann als auch Cornelius Castoriadis waren Philosophen, die sich nicht leicht in die großen philosophischen Schulen des 20. Jahrhunderts einordnen lassen. Beide hatten vielfältige Interessen, darunter auch beschäftigte sie das Problem des „geistigen Seins" oder des „sozialhistorischen Seins". Dieses Problem, d. h. der ontologische Status sozialhistorischer Phänomene, ist das Hauptthema dieses Artikels. Unter Verwendung eines historischen kontextbezogenen vergleichenden Ansatzes sowie eines analytischen und interpretativen Ansatzes stelle ich fest, dass die Diskussionen beider Philosophen zu diesem Thema in einer gemeinsamen Kritik des Reduktionismus in der Sozialtheorie, in ihren Vorschlägen zur ontologischen Schichtung und in der Zuweisung einer spezifischen Seinsform an das Sozialhistorische. Sie unterscheiden sich jedoch auch aufgrund subtiler Abweichungen in der Auffassung der Problemlage. Castoriadis betrachtet das Sozialhistorische im Kontext einer reduktionistisch-deterministischen Erklärungslinie und betont die Kreativität der sozialen Vorstellungskraft und ihre Rolle in sozialen Institutionen. Hartmann befasst sich nicht direkt mit der Frage des Determinismus, da er in seiner Ontologie das Problem der Genese und der Schichtung sorgfältig trennt. Beide kommen zu dem Ergebnis, dass Reduktionismus fruchtlos ist, da die menschliche Existenz eine Schichtenstruktur hat und der sozio-historische Bereich eine spezifische Existenzweise aufweist, die durch freie kulturelle Kreativität und die institutionalisierte Vermittlung kultureller Inhalte gekennzeichnet ist.

Schlüsselwörter: Nicolai Hartmann, Cornelius Castoriadis, geistiges Wesen, sozio-historischer Bereich, Problemgeschichte, Problem, Reduktionismus, Schichtung, Ontologie, Schöpfung, Objektivierung

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