



Alicja Pietras

## Nicolai Hartmann and the Transcendental Method

*In memoriam Professor Andrzej J. Noras (1960–2020)*

**Abstract.** One of the most often explored, repeatedly interpreted, and recognized again and again as a valuable achievement of Kant’s philosophy, is his transcendental philosophy, a new methodological approach that – as Kant believed – will allow philosophy (metaphysics) to enter upon a secure path of science. In this paper, I explore Nicolai Hartmann’s reinterpretation and development of this methodology in both the historical and systematic context of his thought. First, I will deal with the Neo-Kantian’s understanding of the transcendental method as a starting point of Hartmann’s own understanding of it. Then I will analyze in detail his only paper devoted entirely to the problem of the method, ([Hartmann, 1912](#)), to present how he understands the necessary development of this methodology. I will claim that despite the fact that Hartmann – following Kant – never denied that the real essence of philosophy is the transcendental method, he tried to show that this *methodus philosophandi* cannot be reduced to the Neo-Kantian’s understanding of it. He argued that the core of all true philosophical and scientific research is the transcendental method, but only insofar as it is accompanied by two other methods that are needed to complete it: descriptive and dialectical method. I will close by presenting the relations between these three methods.

**Keywords:** transcendental method; descriptive method; dialectical method; Kant; Nicolai Hartmann; neo-Kantianism

### Introduction

Nicolai Hartmann (1882–1950), a student of the Marburg Neo-Kantians Herman Cohen and Paul Natorp, is known as a thinker who wanted to bring ontology back to the place of *philosophia prima*. During his

lifetime, he published a series of ontological works through which he contributed to the development of every main ontological area. Because of that, he was called by Herbert Schnädelbach “the most important renegade of the Marburg Neo-Kantianism” (2000, p. 165) (see also [Noras, 2005](#), p. 221). Since he used the word “phenomenology” to name the first stage of his ontological method, Hartmann is sometimes recognized as a representative of the phenomenological movement ([Spiegelberg, 1965](#), p. 358). But Hartmann himself was rather skeptical about Husserl’s methodology ([Meinong, 1965](#), pp. 213–214)<sup>1</sup>; ([Spiegelberg, 1965](#), p. 358). Furthermore, if we consider that there was no unity of the Marburg school, because at least from 1912 Natorp started to deviate from Cohen ([Holzhey, 1986](#); [Lembeck, 1994](#); [Noras, 2014](#)), it turns out that Hartmann’s ontological program, which is in its very essence nothing else than categorical and modal analysis, can be treated as a continuation and development of the Marburg transcendental philosophy (cf. [Klein, 1952](#), p. 106; [Noras, 2014](#), p. 105).

The relation between Hartmann’s ontology and Herman Cohen and Paul Natorp’s transcendental philosophy is most clearly revealed in the context of his methodological approach. Hartmann’s ontological method, which for the first time fully reveals itself in *Grundzüge einer Metaphysik der Erkenntnis* (1921), begins to form much earlier, as a result of his reinterpretation (than a rejection) of the transcendental method — originating with Kant and as developed by the Neo-Kantians.<sup>2</sup> What he was

---

<sup>1</sup> In his letter to Alexius Meinong, Hartmann wrote: “Hinsichtlich der ‘Ideen’ stimme ich Ihnen durchaus zu. Mich hat dieses Buch sehr enttäuscht. In ihm sind unzählige verdeckte und offene Anlehnungen — ausser an Sie auch an Natorp. Letzteres sehr zum Nachteil der Sache.” ([Meinong, 1965](#), pp. 213–214). My translation: “I totally agree with you about the *Ideas*. I was very disappointed with this book. There are countless hidden and open references — to you and also to Natorp. The latter are very disadvantageous.”

<sup>2</sup> Cf. ([Morgenstern, 1997](#), p. 18): “In den Aufsätzen dieser Zeit, besonders in *Systematische Methode* (1912) und *Systembildung und Idealismus* (1912), beginnt eine vorsichtige Distanzierung vom Marburger Idealismus in methodischen Fragen, ohne daß jedoch ein offener Bruch erfolgt wäre. So stellt Hartmann der transzendentalen Methode der Neukantianismus die deskriptive Methode der Phänomenologie und die dialektische Methode Hegels gleichberechtigt zur Seite und versucht ferner zu zeigen, daß einige zentrale Thesen der Marburger erkenntnistheoretisch neutral sind, also ‘diesseits’ von Idealismus und Realismus stehen” ([Morgenstern, 1997](#), p. 18). My translation: “In the essays of this period, particularly in *Systematische Methode* (1912) und *Systembildung und Idealismus* (1912), a careful distancing from Marburg idealism in methodological questions begins, but without an open break. Hartmann

rejecting was Marburg's *logical idealism* as a metaphysical standpoint, which developed a purely *epistemological* reading of Kant. His interpretation of Kant's "supreme principle" leads him to regard it as a way of linking subjects and objects of cognition through an ontological network, one which does not rely on a logical idealist interpretation of the principle (On this topic see Pietras, 2006, 2011, 2012). Nevertheless, Hartmann never denied the Neo-Kantian claim that the only proper way to develop philosophy as a science is projected by Kant's transcendental method. Quite the contrary, he considered his ontology as the only proper continuation of the metaphysics initiated by Kant, the metaphysics that will be able to enter upon a secure path of science. I maintain that during his philosophical development, he did not reject transcendental method in favor of any other but only enriched this method by incorporating the elements of other thinkers' insights which he valued the most: Nicolai Lossky, Edmund Husserl, and Georg Wilhelm Hegel (cf. Morgenstern, 1997, p. 18; Brelage, 1965, p. 159). Hartmann's ontology involved the sublation (*Aufhebung*) of the philosophy and methodology of his Neo-Kantian teachers.<sup>3</sup>

---

juxtaposes the transcendental method of neo-Kantianism with the descriptive method of phenomenology and the dialectical method of Hegel, considered as equally valid, and also tries to show that some of the Marburger's main theses are epistemologically neutral, that is, that they stand 'this side' of idealism and realism."

See also (Klein, 1952, p. 106): "Hartmanns Ontologie stellt nichts anderes und nicht weniger das als den Versuch einer partialen, weil nur so möglichen Durchführung des von P. Natorp immer wieder ausgesprochenen Programms der Kategorialen Grundlegung aller Philosophie" (Klein, 1952, p. 106). My translation: "Hartmann's ontology represents nothing more and nothing less than an attempt at a partial (because this is the only possible way to do this) implementation of the program of the categorical foundation of all philosophy, which was repeatedly announced by P. Natorp."

<sup>3</sup> Cf. (Hartmann, 2019, pp. 167–168): "The ontological concept of being-in-itself may thus be described as a return of the ontological perspective from *intentio oblique* to *intentio recta*. That which has been sublated [German *das Aufgehobene* – A.P.] preserves as its own the determination from which it stems, strictly according to the Hegelian law of 'sublation' [German *Aufhebung* – A.P.]. The sublated is not simply identical with 'being qua being,' for nothing has been sublated in the latter. It is, in fact, just the look which 'being qua being' takes on when our perspective returns from the reflective to the natural standpoint. Ontological being-in-itself is the *Aufhebung* of the reflective stance incorporated in gnoseological being-in-itself" (Hartmann, 2019, pp. 67–168).

See also (Stallmach, 1982, p. 615): "Hartmann hat mit der Wiedergewinnung der Ontologie einen Schlußpunkt hinter den Marburger neukantischen Idealismus gesetzt,

## The Neo-Kantian Transcendental Method

Among Neo-Kantian researchers, it is generally accepted that the main aim of the Marburg and Southwest Neo-Kantians was not to interpret the “letter” of Kant’s thought, but rather to continue the philosophical investigation in the “spirit” of Kant; that “spirit” had to be extended into other areas not explored by Kant himself (Noras, 2005, p. 213; Makkreel and Luft, 2010, pp. 1–2; Kühn, 2010, pp. 114–116). The Neo-Kantians identified this “spirit” of Kant’s philosophy with a method that he used (Cohen, 1883; Natorp, 1912; Rickert, 1909; Windelband, 1883b). An example (and at the same time the best expression) of this position is Natorp’s lecture to the Kant Society in Halle from April 27, 1912, where he said:

Cohen acknowledged the idea of transcendental method as the core idea to which everything else in Kant should be related and from which it should be understood and evaluated.<sup>4</sup>

(Natorp, 1912, p. 194), my translation

*To be in agreement with Kant’s spirit* meant for Neo-Kantians *to go beyond Kant* (see (Natorp 243); Kühn, 2010, p. 120). The most famous expression of this thought is Windelband’s dictum: “Understanding Kant means going beyond him”<sup>5</sup> (Windelband, 1883a, p. IV, my translation). Between the two main schools of Neo-Kantianism there was unanimity in claiming that Kant’s philosophy requires some corrections.<sup>6</sup> One of the most important issues in Marburg and Southwest methodological investigations was to define the essence of the transcendental method by distinguishing it from other methods with which it was often confused (due to the ambiguity of Kant’s own formulations). Natorp writes:

---

er hat gnoseologisch den Realismus, einen kritischen Realismus, im Lande Kants neu begründet” (Stallmach, 1982, p. 615). My translation: “With the recovery of the ontological approach, Hartmann drew a line behind Marburg neo-Kantian idealism; he gnoseologically reestablished realism, a critical realism, in the land of Kant.”

<sup>4</sup> “Als den Kerngedanken nun, zu dem alles Andere in Kant in Beziehung zu setzen, von wo aus es zu verstehen und zu bewerten sei, begriff Cohen den Gedanken der transzendentalen Methode” (Natorp 1912: 194).

<sup>5</sup> “Kant verstehen, heißt über ihn hinausgehen” (Windelband, 1883a, p. IV).

<sup>6</sup> “[...] über die notwendige Korrekturen an der Lehre Kants unter uns, trotz mancher Unterschiede der Formulierung im einzelnen, doch eine grosse sachliche Übereinstimmung obwaltet” (Natorp, 1912, p. 196). My translation: “[...] there is a great substantive agreement among us about the necessary corrections to Kant’s doctrine, despite some differences in wording regarding details.”

The fixed starting point, the immovable central idea of all our philosophizing is, as was said, the “transcendental method.” We distinguish it — in accord with the manifold meanings of the term “transcendental” in Kant’s philosophy — both from the psychological and metaphysical methods, as well as from a merely logical method in the old, Aristotelian and Wolffian sense, that is, from the method of modern “logistics”.<sup>7</sup>

(Natorp, 1912, p. 196), my translation

There are two important issues mentioned in this quote. The first is a pretty well-known fact that Neo-Kantianism was involved in the opposition to psychologism in philosophy (and made great achievements in this area). Windelband distinguished the *critical method* belonging to philosophy from the *genetic method* belonging to psychology (Windelband, 1883b), while Rickert distinguished *transcendental logic* from *transcendental psychology* (Rickert, 1909). Natorp’s consideration of the *objective* and *subjective* grounding of cognition also deals with this difference between the philosophical (that is, logical) and psychological aspects of human knowledge (Natorp, 1887). The second key issue is that the meaning of what was understood by the term “logic,” as used by Neo-Kantians at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, is different from what we understand by it today (what Natorp called “logistics”). It is because this “logistics,” that is literally “formal logic,” which today a typical language user would simply name “logic,” was just born at the beginning of the twentieth century and therefore was not so widespread as a discipline as it is today. What was understood by “logic” at the time, especially among the Neo-Kantians, was something else, namely Kant’s *transcendental logic* as a doctrine of the principles of pure thinking about objects. According to Kant,

[Transcendental logic has to do] with the laws of the understanding and reason, but solely insofar as they relate *a priori* to objects, and not, as in the case of general logic, to empirical as well as pure cognitions of reason without distinction. (Kant, 1998, A57, B 82, pp. 196–197)

Transcendental logic as related to objects can be called *material* logic and should be distinguished from *formal* logic. As related only *a priori*

---

<sup>7</sup> “Der feste Ausgangspunkt, der unverrückbare Leitgedanke unserer ganzen Philosophierens ist, wie gesagt, “transzendente Methode”. Wir unterscheiden sie — durchaus entsprechend der mehrseitigen Richtung des Terminus “transzendental” bei Kant selbst — sowohl von der psychologischen wie von der metaphysischen, wie von einer bloss logischen im alten, Aristotelischen und etwa Wolfischen Sinne, von dem die moderne “Logistik”” (Natorp, 1912, p. 196).

to the objects, however, it should be called *pure* and is distinguished from *empirical* logic.<sup>8</sup> For the Neo-Kantians, transcendental method is strictly related to this logic; it is a method of transcendental logic.

Through their investigations into the boundaries and methodological differences between various scientific disciplines, the Neo-Kantians made significant contributions to the philosophy of science, especially to the methodology of the sciences and humanities (Windelband, Rickert). Therefore, it is not surprising that almost all of their students, philosophers like Ernst Cassirer or Nicolai Hartmann, as well as the representatives of other sciences, like sociologist Max Weber, showed great awareness of and caution concerning the methodological specificities of the individual scientific disciplines.

The essence of the transcendental method, which, according to the Neo-Kantians, is the only proper philosophical and at the same time scientific method (because they were always interested only in practicing philosophy as a science (cf. Noras, 2005)), is that the aim of philosophy is to give a transcendental justification or legitimization (*deductio juris*) for the problems considered (Natorp, 1912, p. 244). In other words, the aim was to demonstrate the basis of the possibility of investigated “facts,” that is, their lawful basis (*Gesetzesgrund*), which also meant demonstrating the unity of the *logos* (*ratio*) underlying all creative cultural activities (Natorp, 1912, p. 245). Natorp writes as follows:

So what do we mean if [...] — with Kant and even stricter than he — we require “transcendental” reason or justification, the *deductio juris* (as Kant says), for every philosophical position (*Aufstellung*)? This requirement includes TWO ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS. THE FIRST ONE is a reference to the current, historically demonstrable facts about science, morality, art, and religion. Philosophy is not able to breathe in the “airless space” of pure thinking, in which the pure intellect wants to soar on the wings of ideas [...]. This is THE SECOND, decisive requirement of the transcendental method: to uncover the ground of the “possibility” and thus the “legitimization” of the fact, that is, to show and to make

---

<sup>8</sup> This seems to be the main reason why, in the further transcendental investigations which went far beyond the letter of Kant’s philosophy, the concept of the so-called *material a priori* appeared. We can find it in Edmund Husserl’s philosophical investigations (cf. Husserl, 1969; Laciak, 2003), but it looks to be also directly related to some of the Neo-Kantians’ investigations. It can be seen especially in Emil Lask’s project of the logic of philosophy (1923) and also in Heidegger’s investigation on the relation between intuition and expression, that is, in the process of conceptualization (Heidegger, 1993).

clear the lawful basis, the unity of the *logos*, the *ratio* of all such creative acts of culture.<sup>9</sup>

(Natorp, 1912, pp. 196–197), my translation and my emphasis

The Neo-Kantians claim that the transcendental method was a procedure which Kant himself used. The only thing they want to change is to expand the sphere of objects of this kind of justification (legitimization). The *fact* from which Kant started his investigation and which he tried to legitimize (justify) was the *fact of Newtonian physics*. According to this interpretation, Kant takes for granted the validity of Newtonian physics, or in other words, he treats as a given historical and cultural fact the scientific usefulness of Newtonian physics. The whole sense of his critique of pure reason was to theoretically (philosophically) explain this recognized fact, which means, transcendently to justify it by uncovering the ground of its possibility. What the Neo-Kantians want to do is the same thing for other cultural facts: other scientific theories (especially for Einstein's new physics — Ernst Cassirer), other sciences and humanities (Windelband, Rickert), for philosophy (Rickert, Lask), and other areas of human culture: myth, language, religion, etc. (Cassirer).

As I mentioned above, in the Marburg and Southwest schools of Neo-Kantianism the *transcendental method* was strictly distinguished from the *psychological method*. The real transcendental investigation is not a search and description of the *source* of cognition. The source of cognition is the object of the psychological method. In transcendental investigation one is asking about the *basis of the validity* (*Geltung*) of cognition, about the *source of the legitimation* of cognition. The Neo-Kantians reject all interpretations of Kant according to which the investigation of the conditions of the possibility of our experience of objects means examining the psychic (mental) process of cognition. According to them,

---

<sup>9</sup> “Was also meinen wir, wenn wir [...], — mit Kant und nur strenger noch als er — für jene philosophische Aufstellung eine “transzendente” Begründung oder Rechtfertigung, eine *deductio iuris* (wie Kant sagt) verlangen? Diese Forderung schliesst ZWEI WESENTLICHE STÜCKE ein. DAS ERSTE ist die sichere zurückbeziehung auf die vorliegenden, historischen aufweisbaren Fakta der Wissenschaft, der Sittlichkeit, der Kunst, der Religion. Denn Philosophie vermöchte nicht zu atmen in dem “luftleeren Raume” der reinen Gedankens, in dem der blosser Verstand auf den Flügeln der Ideen sich emporschwingen möchte [...]. Und des nur ist DIE ZWEITE, die entscheidende Forderung der transzendentalen Methode: zum Faktum den Grund der “Möglichkeit” und damit den “Rechtsgrund” nachzuweisen, das heisst: eben den Gesetzesgrund, die Einheit des Logos, der Ratio in all solcher schaffenden Tat der Kultur aufzuzeigen und zur Reinheit herauszuarbeiten” (Natorp, 1912, pp. 196–197).

transcendental investigation is not about the *mental* but about the *logical* conditions of possibility. The mental facts investigated by psychology (by using the psychological method) are also the empirical facts and as empirical facts, they require their own transcendental legitimization. As Kant said: “I cannot cognize as an object itself what I must presuppose in order to cognize an object at all” (Kant, 1998, A 402, p. 442).

The transcendental method does not deal with the question of the genesis of human judgments but with the question of the validity of human judgments. The main philosophical question is “*quid juris*,” not the question “*quid facti*.” As Wilhelm Windelband wrote in his article “Kritische oder genetische methode?”: “the problem of philosophy is the *validity* of the axioms” (Windelband, 1883b, p. 108, my translation, my emphasis). A philosopher is not interested in knowing and understanding the way in which scientists come to acknowledge axioms; that can be of interest in psychology or sociology of science. A philosopher is interested in the logical validity of these axioms. He or she asks about the source of this validity, the way in which we can justify our acknowledgement of these axioms. This and only this is the true meaning of the transcendental method.

### Hartmann and the Method of his New Critical Ontology

Hartmann was never a methodologist. Nor did he write a lot about method. Hartmann believed that a method of research is something which we should use and develop *in action*, by investigating specific philosophical problems, rather than by considering it separately as a *topic of discussion*. According to him, “it is only after its test in action that reflection upon method makes sense” (Spiegelberg, 1965, p. 375). In this he follows Hegel, who states in his famous witty remark that wanting to begin research with methodological or epistemological considerations is like *wanting to learn how to swim without stepping into the water*. According to Hartmann (and he claims that this was also true for Kant<sup>10</sup>), methodological considerations should take place only as a reflection after the research on the object. For this reason, to reconstruct Hartmann’s ontological method one has to first become familiar with his ontological investigations. His method, which one can consider to be

---

<sup>10</sup> In all Kant’s works methodological considerations are always placed in the end.



fully independent of his Neo-Kantian teachers' positions, consisted of three stages and was nothing else but a result of his reinterpretation and development of the Neo-Kantian transcendental method, as presented above (*phenomenology*, *aporetics*, and *theory*). Hartmann never rejected transcendental method in favor in any other method (for instance phenomenological); he just "sublated" it in Hegel's meaning of this term (*Aufheben*), that is, reformulated it by enriching it with the elements of other methods which he acknowledged to be valuable.

It is not a coincidence that only one of Hartmann's papers was entirely devoted to the problem of the method. It was published in 1912 in the philosophical journal *Logos* and entitled "Systematische Methode" (Hartmann, 1912); it shows how he passes from the Neo-Kantian transcendental method to his ontological method. This "systematic method," which he presented in this paper (and which consists of the three above mentioned methods), is nothing other than a method consciously or unconsciously exploited in each and every piece of philosophical and scientific research, according to Hartmann. In the beginning, he maintains that:

The following investigation refuses to create and promote a new *methodus philosophandi*, but rather endorses realizing the importance of the well-known old ones.<sup>11</sup> (Hartmann, 1912, p. 124), my translation

This claim is completely consistent with his previously mentioned claim that "the presence and functioning of a method is logically prior to the consciousness of a method"<sup>12</sup> (Hartmann, 1912, p. 150). These three detailed methods, which are parts of the one systematic method (in the order presented by the author) are the (a) *transcendental*, (b) *descriptive*, and (c) *dialectical method*.

Therefore, from the very beginning of his career Hartmann placed the transcendental method among two others, and claimed explicitly that "the three philosophical methods do not form disjunctive or separable

---

<sup>11</sup> "Die nachstehende Untersuchung will sich somit nicht im entferntesten anheischig machen, eine neue *methodus philosophandi* zu konstruieren und anzuempfehlen, sondern vielmehr nur über eine alte, vielbewährte Rechenschaft geben" (Hartmann, 1912, p. 124).

<sup>12</sup> "[...] das Vorhandensein und Funktionieren einer Methode logisch früher ist als das Methoden bewußtsein [...]" (Hartmann, 1912, p. 150).

research opportunities but they occur together when they are used”<sup>13</sup> (Hartmann, 1912, p. 156, my translation).

### The Transcendental Method and its Necessary Complementary Descriptive Method

The first method analyzed by Hartmann in the essay mentioned is the transcendental method. One can find there the most accurate and at the same time most concise definition of the transcendental method formulated in the tradition of German transcendental philosophy:

the transcendental method is the procedure according to which, beginning from the reality of an object, one can infer the conditions of its possibility<sup>14</sup> (Hartmann, 1912, p. 125, my translation)

According to this formulation, the essence of the transcendental method is that one begins with some *given fact* (*phenomenon*) and searches for the *conditions of its possibility*. In other words, the transcendental method consists in moving from *what is conditioned* to *its conditions*, from *fact* to *principle*. In that regard, it is based on reductive inference and can be called reductive reasoning (see Figure 1).

According to Hartmann, this method is as old as philosophy itself. Its actual name came from Kant and the Neo-Kantians, who not only formulated it but also problematized its essence. Nevertheless, we need to recognize, together with Hartmann, that this method was used from the very beginning of philosophy. The transcendental method is “in essence the method of every instituting of principles (*Prinzipien-setzens*)”<sup>15</sup> (Hartmann, 1912, p. 125, my translation). The ancient Greeks were using it while searching for the *arche* of all things.

It has already been revealed that this method cannot be the beginning of any research. If indeed it consists of searching for the principles (the conditions of possibility) of facts that *are given*, then it must be

---

<sup>13</sup> “[...] die drei philosophischen Methoden keine getrennten, oder doch trennbaren Möglichkeiten der Forschung bilden, sondern durchaus nur einheitlich miteinander in Funktion treten können” (Hartmann, 1912, p. 156).

<sup>14</sup> “[...] transzendente Methode ist dann dasjenige Verfahren, nach welchem man, von der Wirklichkeit des Gegenstandes ausgehend, die Bedingungen seiner Möglichkeit erschließt” (Hartmann, 1912, p. 125).

<sup>15</sup> “[...] sie ist im Grunde die Methode alles Prinzipiensetzens [...]” (Hartmann, 1912, p. 125)

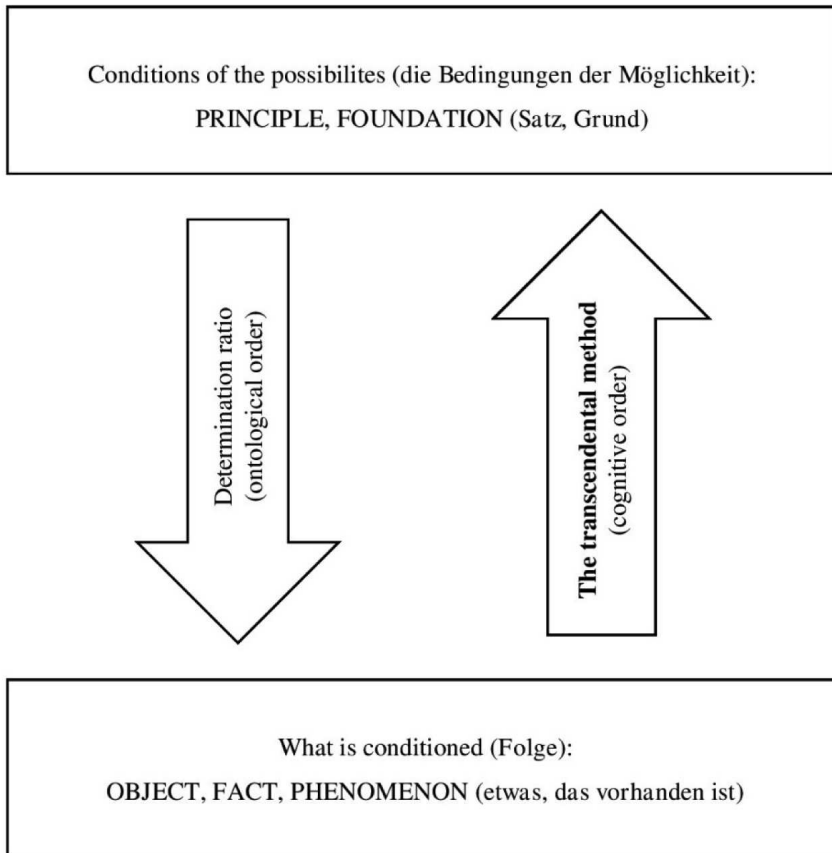


Figure 1.

preceded by the *descriptive method*, which consists in a *description of what is given*. This is why Hartmann often claimed (especially in his ontological works when writing about categories) that “the principle itself appears to be a relational notion”<sup>16</sup> (Hartmann, 1912, p. 126, my translation). That is, the principle exists only insofar as there is an object (*concretum*) for which this principle is a foundation. One of Hartmann’s main ontological laws, the so-called *fundamental law of validity* (*Der Grundsatz der Geltung*), states:

<sup>16</sup> “das Prinzip selbst erweist sich als ein Relationsbegriff” (Hartmann, 1912, p. 126).

Categories are what they are only as the principles of something; without the corresponding *concretum* they are nothing, just as it (the *concretum*) is nothing without them.<sup>17</sup>

(Hartmann, 1940, p. 418, my translation)

We can, therefore, ask: if the transcendental method is not first in the genetic order of scientific research, why does Hartmann begin his methodological analyses with it and not with the descriptive method? It seems that one important reason is that the transcendental method was recognized as the essence of philosophy by his Marburg teachers. Hartmann begins his philosophical path here: from Marburg Neo-Kantianism and Kant, that is, from the transcendental method. However, his further philosophical research leads him to the conclusion that this method is neither independent nor the first, and must be supplemented by other methods — initially, by the descriptive method.

Indeed, one does not begin research with the transcendental method. Considered in the genetic order, this method is rather just the next stage, coming after the descriptive method. Every science begins its research first with a description because one has first to capture and describe some phenomena in order to be able to search for the principles and rules on which they are founded. The principles discovered by the transcendental method are only *logically* prior to objects, they are earlier, but not *in the order of discovery*. Therefore, the younger the science is, the more descriptions and the less general laws and principles it includes. Physics (that is, mathematically based natural science) includes the highest number of principles and general laws because it is the oldest of the sciences (and it is the oldest and the most developed because it concerns the least complex entities, namely — to borrow an expression from Hartmann's ontology — only single-stratum entities). Biology, which is a much younger science (because it concerns more complex, two-strata, living entities), is at an earlier stage of its methodological development. For this reason, it includes far more factual knowledge (that is, descriptions of the structure of various types of organisms) than laws and principles themselves.

When considering the history of some science one can often notice a methodological evolution that is in line with Hartmann's conception. For instance: linguistics arose at first as a purely descriptive science: it involved the description of different languages, their development,

---

<sup>17</sup> "Kategorien sind das, was sie sind, nur als Prinzipien von etwas; sie sind nichts ohne ihr Concretum, wie dieses nichts ohne sie ist" (Hartmann, 1940, p. 418).

and comparative studies of different languages. It was only after some time that the ambition to create generalizations appeared, as well as the search for some universal rules (and structures) common to all languages. At the beginning of the 20th century, Ferdinand de Saussure created a synchronic linguistic program, the aim of which was to discover the universal laws for all languages. After that, Noam Chomsky, considered a father of modern linguistics, postulated the idea of universal grammar, which would contain the laws common for all languages. Both de Saussure and Chomsky's conceptions display the process of transition from the research stage dominated by the descriptive method to the research stage dominated by the transcendental method. This does not mean that nowadays in linguistics there is no descriptive research conducted, or that there is no possibility that such descriptive research will again become dominant. There is no necessity for the dominance of the transcendental method at some stage of a science's evolution. What I want to say is only that the possibility of the transcendental method, and thereby also of its possible dominance, is founded on the descriptive method. The descriptive method itself (and its results) is one of the conditions of the possibility of the transcendental method. This is so because the descriptive method provides the "material" for the transcendental method.

Notwithstanding the genetic priority of the descriptive method, one can also understand why Hartmann's teachers, the Marburg Neo-Kantians, considered the transcendental method to be the essence of "science." Firstly, in accordance to Kant's recommendation, they begin by analyzing the procedure of the natural sciences<sup>18</sup> (especially physics), which — as the oldest discipline — had already entered a more advanced phase of methodological development. Secondly, what should not be forgotten is that from the very beginning of philosophy, scientific cognition meant a search for principles, or general laws, for what is unchanging, common, and universal in the ever-changing phenomenal world. In this

---

<sup>18</sup> There is also a very important issue related to the methodological differences between the natural sciences and humanities considered and developed in Neo-Kantianism, especially in Southwestern Neo-Kantianism by such philosophers as Wilhelm Windelband and Henrich Rickert. There is no place but also no need to provide a detailed analysis of this issue — this problem has already been discussed in the literature. I would like only to say, following Rickert's insight, that it seems that the transcendental method is always more dominant in the natural sciences focused on *general* aspects of reality than in the humanities which are focused on the *individual* aspects of reality.

sense, even if the pure description of phenomena were possible (and as we will see, according to Hartmann, it is not possible), it is itself not an essence of the real scientific method. Although the descriptive method has a *genetic* priority, it has no *logical* priority.

However, it is an unquestionable fact that the transcendental method cannot manage without the complementarity of the descriptive method. It seems that Natorp, even though he did not say it explicitly, was already conscious of this fact when he writes that “philosophy is not able to breathe in the ‘airless space’ of pure thinking” (Natorp, 1912, p. 196). This can be understood as an obvious consequence of Kant’s dictum that “thoughts without content are empty” (Kant, 1998, A 51, B 75, p. 193). But the Neo-Kantians were not very interested in this side of Kant’s doctrine. For this reason, Hartmann supplemented his understandings of the transcendental method with some of the insights of other thinkers.

### **Concepts and Intuitions: Beyond Neo-Kantianism and Phenomenology**

Hartmann’s reformulation of the transcendental method means that he enriched the Neo-Kantian methodology by using the ideas of other thinkers. Concerning the problem of the necessity of enriching the transcendental method by the descriptive method, two thinkers seem the most important. Those are Edmund Husserl with his idea of phenomenology, and also Hartmann’s first philosophical teacher from the period of his study in St. Petersburg, Nicolai Lossky<sup>19</sup> and his intuitionism. Lossky’s influence was not only earlier but also more important. One of the most important of Hartmann’s epistemological ideas was his doctrine on the inseparability of concepts and intuitions<sup>20</sup>, which in relation to the history of German philosophy can be treated as an attempt to reconcile the seemingly oppositional positions of Neo-Kantians and phenomenology.

---

<sup>19</sup> In his 1912 paper, Hartmann mentioned both Husserl and Lossky (Hartmann, 1912, p. 136). As Malfred Brelage rightly remarks: “[The question] to what extent Lossky’s intuitionism influenced Hartmann’s concept of cognition would also require a separate investigation” (Brelage, 1965, p. 159, my translation). Studies of this problem have only recently been undertaken by representatives of the Nicolai Hartmann Society, including Pietras and Tremblay.

<sup>20</sup> More about Hartmann’s doctrine on the inseparability of discourse and intuition see (Pietras, 2013).

It is well known among researchers of the history of German philosophy in the first half of the twentieth-century that one of the most important points of discussion between Neo-Kantianism and phenomenology (in Husserl but then also even more in Heidegger) was the issue of what takes priority in cognition: *thinking* or *intuition*. Each of these most important philosophical movements of the time understands itself as a science of the origin of cognition (Kisiel, 1995, p. 39<sup>21</sup>; see also Noras, 2018, p. 115–116), but they differ in what was considered the origin. I argue that this debate is based on a misunderstanding. Both these schools were looking for the origin of our concepts. I claim that each was in fact looking for something completely different. The Neo-Kantians were looking for the *origin of the validity (form)* of concepts, while phenomenology was looking for the *origin of the content (matter)* of concepts. A good explication of the core of this dispute was provided in Henrich Rickert's paper published in 1934 in *Kant-Studien*, entitled "*Kennen und Erkennen*" (Rickert, 1934). Rickert claims there that intuitionism (the intuitional theory of knowledge) cannot give us any criterion of truth. The reason for this is that, according to him, "intuitionism is necessarily connected with the theory of representation (*Abbild-Theorie*)" (Rickert, 1934, p. 142). It seems that in his paper Rickert critiques Heidegger's position first of all, according to which the real science of origin should be the hermeneutics of facticity and not — as follows from Neo-Kantian analyses — the theories of values which would formulate goals as the ultimate justification for every cultural fact.

Hartmann started his philosophical path in St. Petersburg, where he had an occasion to attend the dispute between the Russian Neo-Kantian philosopher Alexander Vvedensky and the Russian intuitionist Nicolai Lossky. From the very beginning, Hartmann was quite critical of such a strong Neo-Kantian criticism of phenomenological intuition. His much more "centered" position in the debate between Neo-Kantians and phenomenology was not a consequence of the influence of Husserl's phe-

---

<sup>21</sup> "In 1919, a sharp contrast between neo-Kantianism and phenomenology was dictated by the very proximity of the schools. Both approaches in particular lay claim to the venerable ambition of establishing philosophy as the "primal" or "original" science (*Urwissenschaft*). Both seek to determine origins und ultimates, the first and the last things, the underived from which all else is derived, which can only be "shown" or "pointed out" but not "proven," thereby inexorably implicating the original science in a circle, assuming in the beginning what it wishes to find in the end" (Kisiel, 1995, p. 39).

nomenology on him but rather of his exposure to Lossky's intuitionism. If I am correct in this respect, this new historical interpretation can explain the well-known fact that Hartmann's concept of "phenomenology" is quite distant from the project of the phenomenology of Husserl and Heidegger. In Hartmann's methodology, *phenomenology* means nothing else than an accurate description of all that is given, in the broadest sense of the term "given".<sup>22</sup>

Although in his works Hartmann referred directly to Husserl's research, their views of the philosophical method differ fundamentally. The most important difference concerns the fact that, according to Hartmann's view, a phenomenological description cannot be *presuppositionless* (the derivation of all theoretical and conceptual material from pure descriptions is impossible), precisely because the descriptive method is intertwined from the very beginning with the transcendental and dialectical methods. Hartmann states: "Each cognition of an object is at the same time a cognition of a principle"<sup>23</sup> (Hartmann, 1912, p. 129). As pointed out by Rickert, the difference between *Kennen* and *Erkennen* means that every cognition (*Erkennen*) always includes some recognition of principles next to the mere apprehension of the phenomenon, and only that recognition allows one to express the apprehended fact in terms of a concept. *Kennen* simply means "the apprehension of something," but such a pure apprehension does not yet amount to knowledge or cognition (*Erkennen*). Therefore, when describing *phenomenology* as the first stage of philosophical method, Hartmann claims that at this stage one has to consider all available data related to the described phenomena — both what is given to us here and now, as well as all current folk, philosophical, and scientific theories and descriptions. This is necessary in order to complete the material, which will later be compiled and compared in the second stage of research which Hartmann called *aporetics*. The

---

<sup>22</sup> Hartmann's understanding of such terms as "given," "fact" or "phenomenon" is one of the broadest in the history of philosophy. What is given to us, and because of that what should be — as accurately as possible — described in the first — that is *phenomenological* — phase of any scientific research, is not only what Husserl or Heidegger means by pure phenomenon but also all our folk, philosophical and scientific images, concepts and theories which can be called our cultural pre-judgments.

<sup>23</sup> "[...] alle Gegenstandserkenntnis zugleich Prinzipienkenntnis ist" (Hartmann, 1912, p. 129). It seems to me that in this context the analyses of various types of knowledge conducted by Hartmann's first teacher, Nicolai Lossky, should be considered as one of the important sources of Hartmann's thought (see Lossky, 1919).



point is that when describing some philosophical issue at the beginning one should not engage in the *epoché* (bracketing, reducing) of all one's current knowledge of it, as is postulated by Husserl's phenomenological method. On the contrary, one should take care "not to omit anything," i.e., not to enclose oneself in one's theory, science, philosophical system, or individual life experience. Rather, one must try to collect as much data from as many sources as possible. Hartmann tells us that precisely because our knowledge is always limited, which means contextual and necessarily based on assumptions, the best methodological attitude is to observe as many contexts as possible. Thus, Hartmann's *phenomenology* as the first stage of philosophical method is something different from Husserl's *phenomenological description*. Their common belief is that science and philosophy have to start from the description of phenomena but they completely differ in the way in which they understand those *phenomena* and the method of their *description*.

Published in 1912, Hartmann's paper on the systematical method shows that Hartmann was conscious of the inseparable relation between the transcendental and descriptive methods long before he published his work on the metaphysics of cognition, which is usually considered as his break-up with Neo-Kantianism. In doing so, he could have been inspired by both Lossky and Husserl. Considering the possible influence of Husserl on Hartmann, however, it should be said that the real inspiration definitely came not from Husserl's study of the method but from his study of categorial intuition. Hartmann's belief that the transcendental method cannot take place without a descriptive method follows from his recognition that *discursive cognition* and *intuitive cognition* are inseparable.

Hartmann synthesizes the Neo-Kantian recognition that intuitions without concepts are not (yet) what we mean by cognition or knowledge (Rickert, 1904, p. 147) with Lossky and Husserl's insight that without intuitions there can be no concepts. In this manner, Hartmann claims that he is simply continuing Kant's analyses of human cognition by extending (and at the same time generalizing) his doctrine on the two sources of knowledge from *a posteriori* cognition (scientific cognition) into *a priori* cognition (philosophical cognition). Just as Kant claimed that empirical scientific cognition (cognition *a posteriori*) is always a synthesis of concepts and empirical intuitions, otherwise concepts are empty and empirical intuitions are blind, so Hartmann claimed that philosophical cognition (cognition *a priori*) is always a synthesis of some concepts of a higher level, which Lask called *reflective categories* (*reflexive Kate-*

gorien) (1923, pp. 137–150), and some form of non-empirical intuition, which Husserl called *categorical intuition* (*kategoriale Anschauung*) (see Husserl, 1921, pp. 128–163; (Łaciak, 2003, pp. 151–175)), and which Lossky called *intellectual intuition*<sup>24</sup> (Lossky, 1919, p. 364). To put it simply, to adequately combine, compare, and contrast our concepts, one has to grasp their content (*matter*) first.

Every professor can recognize the difference between a student who has just memorized a few sentences and utters them without understanding them and a student who also understands what he is speaking about by using the same words. This phenomenon of “understanding” words is inseparably connected with the ability to “grasp” their content, and this “grasping” is, according to Hartmann (who follows Lossky and Husserl), some form of non-empirical intuition. It is Husserl’s categorical intuition (categorical insight<sup>25</sup>), which Hartmann named *conspective in-*

---

<sup>24</sup> However, the term which Lossky used to name this kind of cognition in the original Russian edition of his book published in 1906 was Умозрение which should literally be translated into English as *speculation* or *speculative knowledge* (Lossky, 1906, p. 325). In the English edition, authorized by him, it is translated both as *speculative knowledge* and as *intellectual intuition* (Lossky, 1919, p. 364)).

<sup>25</sup> The traditional English translation of the German term *Anschauung* is *intuition*, but I also add the alternative translation of *insight*, which I see as a complementary rather than competitive one because I believe it will help in better grasping the meaning of this concept. In reference to (Holzhey, 2010) and (Ströker, 1992), I claim that the term “intuition” should be understood “never otherwise than from the *function* of intuition for cognition, namely in its function of fulfilling empty intentions” (Ströker, 1992, p. 42), (cf. Holzhey, 2010, p. 30) and not by classifying it as sensory cognition contrasted with the intellectual cognition or as receptive cognition contrasted with spontaneous cognition. On this point, Hartmann was most influenced by Husserl and he criticizes not only the Neo-Kantian but also Kant’s original view. But the term “insight” is troublesome because it instantly refers to looking at something by means of the sense of sight. A literal understanding of this term may be the cause for prematurely rejecting the existence of such a thing as categorial insight by referring to the argument which states that the content (or sense) of terms cannot be presented in the form of a picture (real or imagined). One should, however, bear in mind that — first of all — even the sensual intuition (insight) is not limited to the intuition corresponding to only one of our senses (namely sight), but analogously there are other kinds of sensual intuition corresponding to the rest of senses: hearing, smell, taste, and touch. Second of all, the notion of categorical intuition (insight) is connected with the statement that aside from these various types of sensual intuition there must be some type of non-sensual intuitions (non-sensual insight) in which the sense of words is given to us. *Categorical intuition is an insight into the sense of notions that we use.* A good example of such an intellectual insight into the sense of notions is a situation in which a student is looking at a well-known physical or

tuition (1949, p. 519–520), or sometimes also *intuitive thinking*<sup>26</sup>. In his main epistemological work, *Gründzuge einer Metaphysik der Erkenntnis*, he writes:

conspicive intuition [...] is the *a priori* grasping of ideal relations, dependency, relationships, and oppositions (contradictions) [...]. It is the epistemic authority that we stubbornly as well as misleadingly glorify and call “pure thinking” — a term that does not at all reflect the transcendence implied in the act of ideal cognition.<sup>27</sup>

(Hartmann, 1949, p. 519, my translation)

It is probable that Fichte had this kind of non-empirical intuition in mind when he wrote about *Sinn über Sinn* (cf. Siemek, 2011, p. 153) as something that every philosopher must be equipped with.<sup>28</sup> But what is most important in this context is that Hartmann is convinced that:

Every step of inference in thinking, every step of deduction, is intuitive in itself, is an insight in the strict sense of the word. The whole logic of thinking can be understood as a doctrine of laws of indirect intuition (insights).<sup>29</sup>

(Hartmann, 1949, p. 520)

This recognition led Hartmann to postulate the necessity of synthesizing the Neo-Kantian method of pure thinking with Husserl’s and Heideg-

---

mathematical formula and suddenly experiences a kind of “revelation”: “Ah, that’s it.” It is precisely this insight into the sense of the formula, the grasping its overall meaning, which allows one to use it correctly in the future.

<sup>26</sup> In his letter to Heinz Heimsoeth (from 8.8.1912) Hartmann writes: “Mir ist zehn Jahren von meinen ersten philosophischen Lehrern in Rußland eingepaukt worden, daß es “intuitives und diskursives Denken” giebt” (1978, p. 127). My translation: “My first philosophical teacher in Russia taught me ten years ago that there is ‘intuitive and discursive thinking.’”

<sup>27</sup> “Konspektiven Intuition [...] ist das apriorische Erfassen der idealen Relationen, Abhängigkeit, Zusammenhänge und Gegensätzlichkeiten (Widersprüche) [...]. Es ist diejenige Erkenntnisinstanz, die man ebenso hartnäckig wie mißverständlich als das “reine Denken” bezeichnet und verherrlicht hat — ein Terminus, in dem die durchaus mit gemeinte Transzendenz des idealen Erkenntnisaktes keineswegs zu ihrem Recht kommt” (Hartmann, 1949, p. 519).

<sup>28</sup> Not without significance is the fact that Fichte, and after him (and before Heidegger) Lask, already came to the conclusion that the final origin of the matter (content) of all our concepts, and thereby also all our culture, has to be nothing else than our everyday human life-experiences.

<sup>29</sup> “Jeder Schritt des denkenden Schließen, jeder Schritt der Deduktion, ist an sich intuitiv, ist Einsicht, im strengen Sinne des Wortes. Die ganze Logik des Gedankens läßt sich auffassen als eine Gesetzlichkeit des vermittelnden Anschauens” (Hartmann, 1949, p. 520).

ger's phenomenological method (cf. Pietras, 2013), and he considered his ontological methodology to be an attempt to realize this task.

### The Meaning of the Dialectical Method

This is not the end of Hartmann's enrichment of the Neo-Kantian transcendental method. The 1912 article reveals that Hartmann's methodological position from the very beginning was inspired by many historical sources. One of them is the idea of the dialectical method, which is as old as philosophy but which was renewed in modern times by the German Idealists, especially Hegel. In his paper on the systematic method, Hartmann argues that neither the transcendental method nor the descriptive method can work without the dialectical method.

According to Hartmann, the dialectical method is a method that one uses when analyzing the relation between principles (that is, concepts). If we revisit our Figure 1, we can assert that:

- (a) the TRANSCENDENTAL METHOD is the method of transition from a given object (fact, phenomenon) to a principle,
- (b) the DESCRIPTIVE METHOD is a method used at the level of an object (fact, phenomenon) in order to provide its description as a matter for the transcendental method, and
- (c) the DIALECTICAL METHOD is a method used at the level of principles themselves: it is a method of searching, analyzing, and describing the relationships within the system of principles (that is, among concepts themselves) (see Figure 2).

At this point, we have to remember an important fact already emphasized in the literature (see Noras, 1999, p. 69), namely that Hartmann never denied that philosophy searches for a system. The idea of a system is something that must necessarily accompany all philosophy and science. Of course, Hartmann is also known for his critique of every form of *\_ism*, by which he understands all kinds of reified systems (like naturalism, biologism, psychologism, sociologism, pantheism, idealism, etc.). But it does not mean that he denies that a system is the aim of our research. He is not against the idea of a system in general. What he is against is constructing a system before examining relevant phenomena. As a matter of fact, in every study, the dialectical method always accompanies the use of the transcendental and descriptive methods.

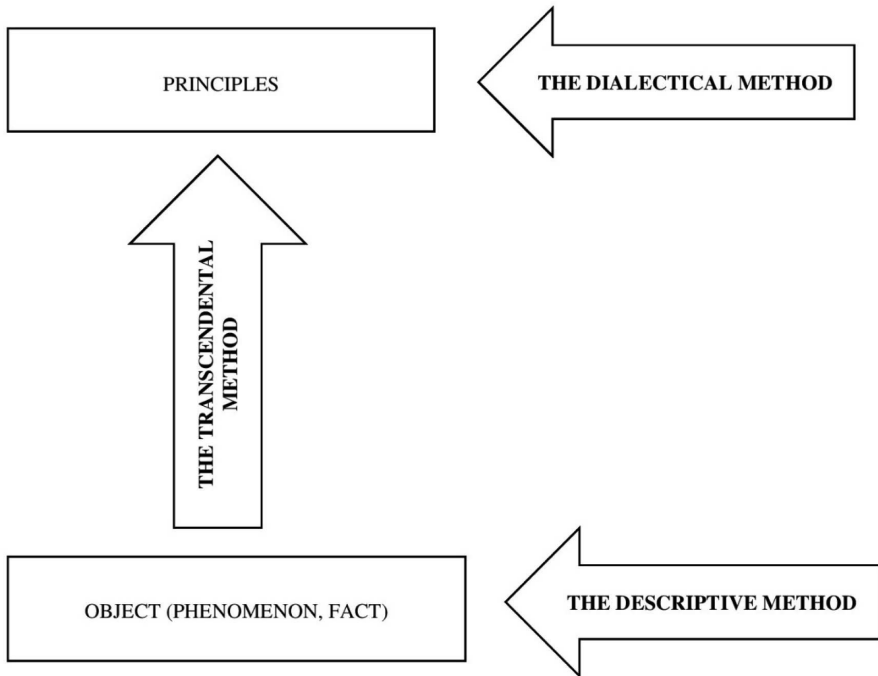


Figure 2.

A good example illustrating this realization would be an analysis of the theoretical beginnings of sociology as an independent discipline. To describe social phenomena, the first sociologists used concepts, terms, and principles from other sciences, for instance from biology. Comte, Spencer, and Durkheim's comparison of *societies* and *living organisms* was an inexhaustible source of inspiration for early sociological studies. Through their knowledge of the order of principles developed within the natural sciences (especially biology), they were able to construct hypotheses regarding the principles ordering social facts. Indeed, every "fledgling" scientific discipline presents its hypotheses in such a way that the postulated principles are treated as a complement to some previously constructed system of principles. We can accept this as long as one treats these principles postulated in the beginning (taken from the current system) only as preliminary hypotheses and not as definitive and uncorrectable theories. Hartmann states:

It should not be disconcerting that the dialectical nature of fundamental interconnections extends to the descriptive givenness of an object. The object, in all its indeterminacy, presupposes the *a priori* of principles just as much as does all scientific content.<sup>30</sup>

(Hartmann, 1912, p. 157, my translation)

In other words, it means that when we encounter something that *is given* to us (*kennen*) but *not yet known* (not yet determined and defined) (*noch nicht erkennt*<sup>31</sup>), we first anticipate its properties — we expect it to have some specific features and behave in some specific manner — because these properties and behavior match with a specific system of principles (*a priori*) which we use because we created it and accepted it earlier based on some different phenomena previously given. This happens, for example, when we transfer the laws discovered by more advanced disciplines (e.g., biology, chemistry, and physics) into younger, emerging disciplines (e.g., psychology, sociology). It is obvious that further development of these scientific disciplines leads to the correcting of these laws but only as far as the descriptive method provides an increasing number of descriptions of examined facts. The reason for this is that an emergence of a new scientific discipline is always caused by discovering a new region of being (a new region of objects, entities) which we try to describe first by using initially quite “provisional” concepts, often taken from other existing and previously developed disciplines, to establish (by utilizing the transcendental method) their own principles and laws which would be compatible with the whole system.

Therefore, we have to distinguish between the *proper* and *improper* uses of the dialectical method. Improper uses of the dialectical method, of which Kant already warned, occur when one applies it without the assistance of the other two methods, namely the descriptive and transcendental methods. This is the point of Hartmann’s critique of philosophical systems (so-called *isms*). Hartmann claims that this is a common mistake when someone who discovers some principles which are valid within one sphere of being (for instance, organic beings, as described by biol-

---

<sup>30</sup> “So darf es nicht befremden, daß der dialektische Charakter der Fundamentalzusammenhänge sich bis in die deskriptive Gegebenheit des Gegenstandes hinab erstreckt. Dieser Gegenstand, in aller seiner Unbestimmtheit, setzt eben doch genau so gut wie aller wissenschaftliche Inhalt, das *a priori* der Prinzipien voraus [...]” (Hartmann, 1912, p. 157).

<sup>31</sup> The distinction between “being given” and “knowing” is based on the Neo-Kantian distinction between *Kennen* and *Erkennen* (Rickert, 1934).

ogy) transfers these principles into another sphere of being (for instance, socio-cultural being, as described by sociology) and treats them as final and uncorrectable rather than as merely provisional and temporary (see [Hartmann, 1953](#), pp. 56–59). The attempt to apply the principles discovered in one region to another region is not a mistake in itself, because it is what we do by using the dialectical method. One can, of course, relate this to the widespread regulative idea of “the *unity of nature*.” The real source of the mistake consists in a lack of examination of the validity of these principles within this particular sphere of being. Hartmann states:

It is necessary to proceed cautiously. In general, the sphere of applicability cannot be limited for all categories to that stratum in whose territory they were discovered and where they stand most clearly revealed in actual structures. There is also a genuine ontic overlapping of strata. This overlapping is not arbitrary; it is determined by very definite relations between the strata [...]. It is impossible to tell at first sight whether a category discovered in a certain field is limited to this field or whether it reaches into the neighboring strata. In every particular case, this requires a special examination

([Hartmann, 1953](#), p. 58)

This necessary examination of the validity of certain principles (transferred by using the dialectical method from other fields) for a particular field requires using both descriptive and transcendental methods. The dialectically derived system of principles must be constantly corrected as far as new descriptions of facts appear. When the data collected in the first stage of the method (which Hartmann latter calls *phenomenology* instead of *descriptive method*) contradicts the previously sketched theory, then such incompatibility should be analyzed in the second stage of the method, in *aporetics*. We cannot deny the existence of these newly discovered phenomena just because they are not compatible with our previously constructed system (theory). However, this does not change the fact that every “fledgling” science must first draw its concepts and principles from some other system. The reason for this is that Hartmann does not believe in the possibility of pure description, which means that, just as the dialectical method must always be supported by the descriptive and transcendental methods, the descriptive method must always work side by side with the dialectical and transcendental methods. To create a description, we need concepts. While writing about the dialectical method, both in the essay being discussed and in other works, Hartmann often mentions two philosophers in particular:

Plato and Hegel. Plato described dialectics as a soul's transition from assumptions (hypothesis) to the unconditional beginning;<sup>32</sup> he claimed that the dialectical method must necessarily supplement the axiomatic method because our assumptions (hypotheses) require constant verification. Dialectics is, therefore, moving up and down among the principles (see Plato, 1968, 511bc). Concerning Hegel, Hartmann considers as the most valuable element of his thought not so much his description of how the dialectical method works (including the famous scheme: *thesis*, *antithesis*, *synthesis*), but rather his descriptions of many real dialectical processes occurring within objective spirit. In the article, "*Hegel und das Problem der Realdialektik*," Hartmann states:

Dialectic is clearly rooted in the philosophy of spirit [*Geistesphilosophie*]. Here it grows out of its relation to the object, indeed out of its own objective structure. We must therefore look at this region [*Gebiet*] of objects, if we want to do justice to it. Here it has to show for itself achievements that have nothing to do with the metaphysical presuppositions of Rational Idealism [*Vernunft-Idealismus*].<sup>33</sup>

(Hartmann 1935, p. 324, translated by Frederic Tremblay)

Therefore, Hegel's philosophy appears to be valuable because it reveals that the sphere of spiritual being (culture) — encompassing *all human thinking*, cognition, philosophy, and science — is *dialectical* in its very essence. As a consequence of this fact the dialectical method always necessarily<sup>34</sup> accompanies the two other methods in all our philosophical and scientific investigations.

More detailed and advanced analysis of the meaning and procedure of the dialectical method can be found in Hartmann's later work *Der Aufbau der realen Welt* (1940). In the two final chapters (64 and 65) he presents two methodological procedures which can be understood as a development of the dialectical method resulting from his categorical

---

<sup>32</sup> "[A soul] makes its way to a beginning that is free from hypotheses; starting from hypothesis and without the images used in the other part, by means of forms themselves it makes its inquiry through them" (Plato, 1968, 510b).

<sup>33</sup> "Die Dialektik wurzelt eindeutig in der Geistesphilosophie. Hier wächst sie aus dem Verhältnis zum Gegenstande, ja aus seiner eigenen objektiven Struktur heraus. Auf dieses Gebiet muß man hinblicken, wenn man ihr gerecht werden will. Hier hat sie Errungenschaften aufzuweisen, die mit den metaphysischen Voraussetzungen des Vernunft-Idealismus nichts zu tun haben" (Hartmann, 1935, p. 324).

<sup>34</sup> This is not only a methodological postulate, but a fact occurring in all real human thinking.



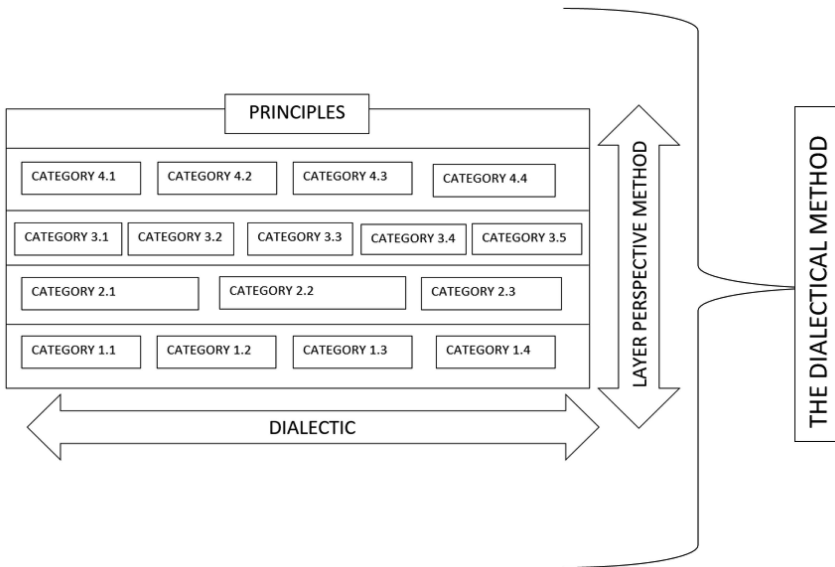


Figure 3.

analyses presented in the book. These are *dialectic* (or *categorical dialectic*<sup>35</sup>) and the *layer perspective method*. Both are methods used at the level of principles themselves. For this reason, we can consider them to be two different versions (two variants) of the dialectical method from the 1912 paper. The difference between these two procedures is that whereas the former moves among the principles on a horizontal plane, the latter moves among principles on a vertical plane (see Figure 3). Hartmann himself finds them to be two dimensions of conspensive insight (see Hartmann, 1940, pp. 538, 605).

According to Hartmann, *dialectic* is a procedure in which — on the basis on *categorical laws of coherence* — from the knowledge of a single category (principle) from a particular layer we can gain some new knowledge of the structure of all categories determining this particular ontological layer, or vice versa, from the knowledge of the general categorical structure of particular layer we can get some new knowledge of a single category from this layer. In other words, dialectic is presented

<sup>35</sup> In this work Hartmann distinguishes two kinds of dialectic: *categorical dialectic* (which he considers to be a proper way of using the dialectical method) and *speculative dialectic* (which he considers to be an improper way of using the dialectical method) (Hartmann, 1940, pp. 597–598).

as a kind of inference taking place in the domain of principles of the same ontological level. It is moving between principles on a horizontal plane. The *layer perspective method*, on the other hand, is a procedure in which—on the basis of *categorical laws of stratification*—from the knowledge of a category (or categories) of one layer we can get some new knowledge of a category (or categories) of another layer. The layer perspective methodological procedure is presented as a kind of inference taking place between principles from different ontological levels. It is moving between principles on a vertical axis.

Hartmann presents very detailed rules concerning both of these procedures (Hartmann, 1940, Chapters 64d and 65b, pp. 598–600, 607–609). But what is crucial for the main thesis of my paper is that he recognized them to be very fruitful and also the necessary supplements to the analytical and descriptive methods presented in Chapter 63.

In relation to the procedure of *categorical dialectic*, he writes:

The mutual interpenetration of analysis and dialectic obviously forms a systematic structure of methods in which the heterogeneous ways of working accompany each other and correct one another step by step. To be exact, it is actually a structure of three methods; for description plays a role here as well, insofar as its advance always makes possible the inference new conclusions. In this structure, the analytical method forms the central interconnection, because dialectic and description do not meet directly. Rather, they work in parallel. If the description makes a new inference possible, what is thus inferred creates the basis for a new conspective dialectical insight; but if the dialectic leads to new categories, these, in turn, are checked in terms of their compliance with the description of the *concretum*.<sup>36</sup>

(Hartmann, 1940, p. 596, my translation)

---

<sup>36</sup> “Das Ineingreifen von Analysis und Dialektik bildet offenbar ein Gefüge der Methoden, in welchem die heterogenen Arbeitsweisen von Schritt zu Schritt einander begleiten und berichtigen. Ja, es ist streng genommen ein Gefüge dreier Methoden; denn auch die Deskription spielt mit hinein, sofern ihr Fortschreiten immer wieder neuen Rückschluß ermöglicht. In diesem Gefüge nimmt die analytische Methode die verbindende Mitte ein, denn Dialektik und Deskription berühren sich nicht unmittelbar. Wohl aber arbeiten sie parallel. Hat die Deskription einen neuen Rückschluß ermöglicht, so ist das von diesem Erschlossene sogleich Basis neuer dialektischer Zusammenschau; hat aber Dialektik zu neuen Kategorien hingeführt, so unterliegen diese wiederum der Kontrolle durch Übereinstimmung mit dem deskriptiv erfaßten *Concretum*“ (Hartmann, 1940, p. 596).

This passage remains in line with Hartmann's methodological conclusions from 1912. All three methods must work together, but one of them has a central position as a medium between the other two. What was changed is only the name of this intermediary methodological procedure. Now Hartmann calls it *analysis* instead of *transcendental method*. But in its very essence it is still the same procedure which was described as an inference from the reality of the object (*concretum*) to the conditions of its possibility (categories).

### The Transcendental Method as the Core of Philosophy and Science

It follows from what has been said that, while the descriptive method is the first in the chronological order and the dialectical method is the first in the logical order, the real core of all science is still the transcendental method. This method provides the transition from the descriptions of facts to the principles which are the conditions of their possibility. In other words, the transcendental method binds these two other methods. Hartmann writes:

It is the central position and the intermediary function between dialectic and the description that ensures that the transcendental method takes precedence in all philosophical ways of thinking, while the other two [methods] mark the upper and lower limits of all knowledge. That is why it is not only with necessity, but also justifiably in the foreground of all philosophical consciousness of method.<sup>37</sup>

(Hartmann, 1912, p. 163, my translation)

Considering this, we see that Hartmann's deviation from neo-Kantianism, at least in his methodology, is not as significant as it might seem at first glance. Of course, in his famous *Metaphysics of Cognition* (1921), Hartmann did not speak about the transcendental, descriptive, and dialectical methods. There he uses more colloquial forms of expression and divided the method into three stages: *phenomenology*, *aporetics*, and

---

<sup>37</sup> "Die Mittelstellung und die vermittelnde Funktion zwischen Dialektik und Deskription ist es, die der transzendentalen Methode den Vortritt in aller philosophischen Denkweise sichert, während jene beiden die obere und die untere Grenze aller Erkennbarkeit markieren. Deswegen auch steht sie nicht nur mit Notwendigkeit, sondern auch mit Recht im Vordergrund alles philosophischen Methodenbewußtseins" (Hartmann, 1912, p. 163).

*theory*. One can also notice that his methodological insight is partially changing, at least in its expression, during the further development of his intellectual work. When presenting his methodological reflections at the end of his later work *Der Aufbau der realen Welt* (1940), he describes three methods of ontological work: *analysis* (which itself consists of two stages: *description* and *inference*), *dialectic*, and the *layer perspective method*. For this reason, it is not so easy to conclude definitively that his idea of method did not essentially change during his lifetime. But having in mind his own declaration that the consciousness of the method comes always at the end, it would be more proper to say that he was completing, rather than essentially changing, his early description of the method. Therefore, from the systematical perspective, further research on the relation between methodological reflection from different periods of Hartmann's work would be very valuable. It is hard not to notice some continuity in all these changes. There is a strict similarity in terms of content between the *descriptive method* from 1912, *phenomenology* from 1921, and the first stage of *analysis* (namely the *description*) from 1940. All these terms refer to the method used at the level of an object (fact, phenomenon or *concretum*) in order to provide its description as a starting point for inference. Every Hartmann scholar will also notice content similarity between *transcendental method* from 1912 and the second stage of analysis (namely the *method of hypothetical inference*) from 1940. They are two different names for one and the same procedure of transition from a given object (*concretum*) to principles (categories). The *dialectical method* from 1912 seems to find its continuation not only in *dialectic* but also in the *layer perspective method* from 1940. Both of these procedures are used at the level of principles themselves in order to search, analyze and describe the relations within the whole system of categories. But there are also some questions and issues which would need deeper analysis, for instance: what is the relation between *aporetics* and *dialectical method*? Does *theory* as a last stage of method from 1921 find its equivalent in the methodological reflections from 1912 and 1940? Can the stage of *theory-building* be identified with *hypothetical analysis* and thus with the *transcendental method*? The fact that Hartmann does not consider "methodology" to be a separate philosophical issue makes these kinds of question very difficult to answer.

However, regardless of all these issues, at all stages of the development of Hartmann's thought the transcendental method (in its meaning presented in this paper) consistently has a special intermediate position

between description and dialectic. Therefore, one can conclude that the very essence of every science — and one has to remember that Hartmann, just like his Marburg teachers, always recognizes philosophy as a science — remains the transcendental method as the method of infinite searching for ever better theoretical (that is, expressed in some optimal system of concepts) explanations of the given phenomena. According to Hartmann, even all modern critique of cognition (even with its main achievement, the uncovering of the limits of human knowledge), does not in any way invalidate the effort of searching for an optimal system of knowledge as a reasonable aim. It only makes us conscious of the infinity of this process.

**Acknowledgements.** I want to thank the referee for carefully reading the manuscript and giving constructive comments that substantially helped improve the quality of the paper, as well as for their editorial assistance in the final stages.

### References

- Brelage, M., 1965, *Studien zur Transzendentalphilosophie*, Walter de Gruyter: Berlin.
- Cohen, H., 1883, *Von Kants Einfluss auf die deutsche Kultur. Rede bei der Marburger Universität-Feier des Geburtstages des Sr. Majestät des Kaisers und Königs am 17. März 1883 gehalten Dr. Hermann Cohen*, F. Dümmers: Berlin.
- Hartmann, N., 1912, “Systematische Methode”, *Logos* 3, 121–163.
- Hartmann, N., 1935, “Hegel und das Problem der Realdialektik”, *Blätter für Deutsche Philosophie* 9 (1): 1–27.
- Hartmann, N., 1940, *Der Aufbau der realen Welt. Grundriss der allgemeinen Kategorienlehre*, Walter de Gruyter: Berlin.
- Hartmann, N., 1949, *Grundzüge einer Metaphysik der Erkenntnis*, 4th edition, Walter de Gruyter: Berlin.
- Hartmann, N., 1953, *New Ways of Ontology*, trans. R. C. Kuhn, Henry Regnery Company: Chicago.
- Hartmann, N., 1978, *Nicolai Hartmann und Heinz Heimsoeth im Briefwechsel*, von F. Hartmann and R. Heimsoeth (eds.), Bouvier Verlag Herbert Grundmann: Bonn.

- Hartmann, N., 2019, *Ontology: Laying the Foundations*, trans. K. R. Peterson, Walter de Gruyter: Berlin, Boston. DOI: [10.1515/9783110627350](https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110627350)
- Heidegger, M., 1993, *Phänomenologie der Anschauung und des Ausdrucks. Theorie der philosophischen Begriffsbildung*, in *Gesamtausgabe*, Section II: “Lectures 1919–1944”, Vol. 59, Vittorio Klostermann: Frankfurt am Main.
- Holzhey, H., 1986, *Cohen und Natorp. Band I: Ursprung und Einheit. Die Geschichte der Marburger Schule als Auseinandersetzung um die Logik des Denkens*, Schwabe: Basel.
- Holzhey, H., 2010, “Neo-Kantianism and phenomenology: The problem of intuition”, pages 25–40 in R. A. Makkreel and S. Luft (eds.), *Neo-Kantianism in Contemporary Philosophy*, Indiana University Press: Bloomington and Indianapolis.
- Husserl, E., 1921, *Logische Untersuchungen*, Vol. 2, *Elemente einer phänomenologischen Aufklärung der Erkenntnis*, part 2, 2th edition, Max Niemeyer: Halle.
- Husserl, E., 1969, *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, trans. D. Cairns and M. Nijhoff: The Hague. DOI: [10.1007/978-94-017-4900-8](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-017-4900-8)
- Kant, I., 1998, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge. DOI: [10.1017/CB09780511804649](https://doi.org/10.1017/CB09780511804649)
- Kisiel, T., 1995, *The Genesis of Heidegger's Being and Time*, University of California Press: Berkeley, Los Angeles, London.
- Klein, J., 1952, “Nicolai Hartmann und die Marburger Schule”, in H. Heimsoeth and R. Heiß (eds.), *Nicolai Hartmann. Der Denker und sein Werk. Fünfzehn Abhandlungen mit einer Bibliographie*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht: Göttingen.
- Kühn, M., 2010, “Interpreting Kant correctly: On the Kant of the Neokantians”, pages 113–131 in R. A. Makkreel and S. Luft (eds.), *Neo-Kantianism in Contemporary Philosophy*, Indiana University Press: Bloomington and Indianapolis.
- Lask, E., 1923, “Die Logik der Philosophie und die Kategorienlehre”, in *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. II, E. Herrigel (ed.), Verlag von J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck): Tübingen.
- Lembeck, K.-H., 1994, *Platon in Marburg. Platon-Rezeption und Philosophiegeschichtsphilosophie bei Cohen und Natorp (Studien Materialien zum Neukantianismus)*, Königshausen & Neumann.
- Lossky, N., 1906, *Obosnovanie intuitivizma* [The foundations of Intuitivism], St. Petersburg University.

- Lossky, N., 1919, *The Intuitive Basis of Knowledge*, trans. N. A. Puddington, MacMillan and Co.: London.
- Łaciak, P., 2003, *Struktura i rodzaje poznania a priori w rozumieniu Kanta i Husserla*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego w Katowicach: Katowice.
- Makkreel, R. A., and S. Luft, 2010, "Introduction", pages 1–21 in R. A. Makkreel and S. Luft (eds.), *Neo-Kantianism in Contemporary Philosophy*, Indiana University Press: Bloomington and Indianapolis.
- Meinong, A., 1965, *Philosophenbriefe. Aus der wissenschaftlichen Korrespondenz von Alexius Meinong*, von R. Kindinger (ed.), Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt: Graz.
- Morgenstern, M., 1997, *Nicolai Hartmann zur Einführung*, Junius: Hamburg.
- Natorp, P., 1887, "Über objektive und subjektive Begründung der Erkenntnis", *Philosophische Monatshefte* 23: 257–286.
- Natorp, P., 1912, "Kant und die Marburger Schule", *Kant-Studien* 17: 193–221.
- Noras, A. J., 1999, "Problem metafizyki. Nicolai Hartmann a Immanuel Kant", *Folia Philosophica* 17: 67–78.
- Noras, A. J., 2005, *Kant a neokantyzm badeński i marburski*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego w Katowicach: Katowice.
- Noras, A. J., 2014, "Pojęcie samoświadomości w filozofii świadomości Paula Natorpa", *Folia Philosophica* 32: 87–106.
- Noras, A. J., 2018, *Filozof czystego poznania. Rzecz o Hermanie Cohenie*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego w Katowicach: Katowice.
- Pietras, A., 2006, "Pojęcie kategorii a problem granic poznania. Nicolai Hartmann a Immanuel Kant", *Czasopismo Filozoficzne* 1: 22–40.  
<http://czasopismofilozoficzne.us.edu.pl/pliki/AlicjaPietras-Pojecie%20kategorii.pdf>
- Pietras, A., 2011, "Nicolai Hartmann as a Post-Neo-Kantian", pages 237–251 in R. Poli, C. Scognamiglio and F. Tremblay (eds.), *The Philosophy of Nicolai Hartmann*, Walter de Gruyter: Berlin, Boston.
- Pietras, A., 2012, *W stronę ontologii. Nicolaia Hartmanna i Martina Heideggera postneokantowskie projekty filozofii*, Universitas: Kraków.
- Pietras, A., 2013, "Nicolaia Hartmanna projekt syntezy myślenia i intuicji", *Przegląd Filozoficzny, Nowa Seria* 22: 1 (85): 335–350.
- Plato, 1968, *The Republic*, trans. A. Bloom. [http://www.inp.uw.edu.pl/mdsie/Political\\_Thought/Plato-Republic.pdf](http://www.inp.uw.edu.pl/mdsie/Political_Thought/Plato-Republic.pdf) (28.05.2019)

- Rickert, H., 1904, *Der Gegenstand der Erkenntnis: Einführung in die Transzendentalphilosophie*, Verlag von J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck): Tübingen, Leipzig.
- Rickert, H., 1909, "Zwei Wege der Erkenntnistheorie. Transzendentalpsychologie und Transzendentallogik", *Kant-Studien* 14: 169–228.
- Rickert, H., 1934, "Kennen und erkennen", *Kant-Studien* 39: 139–155.
- Schnädelbach, H., 2000, "Erkenntnis der Erkenntnis? Eine Verteidigung der Erkenntnistheorie", in *Philosophie in der modernen Kultur. Vorträge und Abhandlungen* 3: Frankfurtam Main.
- Siemek, M., 2011, *Wykłady z klasycznej filozofii niemieckiej*, PWN: Warszawa.
- Spiegelberg, H., 1965, *The Phenomenological Movement*, 2th edition, Martinus Nijhoff: The Hagen. DOI: [10.1007/978-94-015-7394-8](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-015-7394-8)
- Stallmach, J., 1982, "Nicolai Hartmann 1882–1982", *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung* 36 (4): 614–619.
- Ströker, E., 1992, *Zu Husserl Werk. Zur Ausgabe der Gesammelten Schriften*, Meiner: Hamburg.
- Windelband, W., 1883a, "Vorwort" [Preface to the first edition], pages III–IV in (Windelband, 1915), Vol. 1. <https://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/windelband1915bd1/0007>
- Windelband, W., 1883b, "Kritische oder genetische Methode?", pages 99–135 in (Windelband, 1915), Vol. 2. <https://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/windelband1915bd2/0107>
- Windelband, W., 1915, *Präudien. Aufsätze und Reden zur Philosophie und ihrer Geschichte*, 5th edition, Verlag von J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck): Tübingen.  
<https://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/windelband1915ga>

ALICJA PIETRAS

Institute of Philosophy

University of Silesia in Katowice, Poland

[alicja.pietras@gmail.com](mailto:alicja.pietras@gmail.com)