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The Problem of Aesthetic Being. The Aesthetic Object in the Light of the Ontology of Nicolai Hartmann

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In this article, I address the issue of the ontological status of the aesthetic object, which will be narrowed down to one problem, which can be expressed by the question: is the aesthetic object a being? This problem, of course, has numerous ramifications, which will find their expression in further parts of the article. The analyses conducted therein will concern: 1. the place of the aesthetic object in ontological considerations, especially whether it constitutes, on equal terms with real and ideal being, the object of ontological research; 2. its existential specificity (secondary to the reality and ideality of existence); 3. the similarity of the structure of the aesthetic object to the structure of the real world.

Keywords: ontology, aesthetics, reality, unreality, being, structure, layer

I. Preliminary Remarks

The title of this article directly refers to Nicolai Hartmann's work, *The Problem of Spiritual Being. Investigations into the Foundations of the Philosophy of History and the Human Sciences*, the 90th anniversary of its publication falling in 2023 (N. Hartmann, *Das Problem des geistigen Seins. Untersuchungen zur Grundlegung der Geschichtsphilosophie und der Geisteswissenschaften*, Walter

de Gruyter & Co., Berlin and Leipzig 1933). Considering the celebratory context, it is worth noting that this year also marks the 70th anniversary of the first edition of *Aesthetics* (N. Hartmann, *Ästhetik*, de Gruyter, Berlin 1953). These anniversaries provide an opportunity to present this aspect of his philosophy that concerns spiritual being, and therefore, aesthetics. However, this personal context cannot replace or dominate the strictly philosophical context. The history of philosophy is not merely a history of philosophers but an ever-living, evolving, and deepening history of problems and their contents. Among them is the problem of the aesthetic object.

But in what strictly philosophical sense does the aesthetic object pose a problem, or what problems does it generate? This article will address the most important issue from the author's perspective, which is either directly considered by Hartmann or indirectly results from his aesthetic conception. It can be expressed in the following question: is the aesthetic object a being? What is at stake in this question, which may puzzle the reader, is not whether a piece of art as an aesthetic object exists for him in any way—it may indeed exist as an object of his aesthetic experience, as a testimony of the spirit of the times, as a sociological, or even economic fact, and so forth—but whether, from the ontological point of view, it is a being, and not merely its shadow, semblance, illusion or phantasm. We will address this question using as our basis Hartmann's concept of being.

Consideration of this problem is ostensibly theoretical. If works of art and other aesthetic objects are not beings, their ontological status is minimal. They are then secondary to being, subordinate to it, and do not require deep reflection. Moreover, we can treat them as mere decorations of the real world, and artistic creativity as a kind of game, lacking philosophical, life or social seriousness. The answer to the ontological question—whether the aesthetic object is a being—thus has practical consequences. In this sense, ontological considerations are directly involved in the practice of experiencing and evaluating this object. Even though already in his opening sentence to *Aesthetics* Hartmann holds that: "One writes aesthetics neither for the creator nor for the patron of arts, but exclusively for the thinker, for whom the doings and the attitudes of both have become a puzzle,"[1] we nevertheless believe that the problems addressed therein, and this question in

[1] Nicolai Hartmann, *Aesthetics,* trans. by Eugene Kelly (Berlin-Boston: de Gruyter, 2014), 1.

particular, may, and indeed should, interest creators and lovers of art alike, but we should not entertain great hopes in this regard.

The fundamental question of whether the aesthetic object, especially a work of art, is a being will be further deepened in subsequent parts of the article and will concern the question whether its cognition falls under the fundamental goals of ontology (III. The Aesthetic Object and the Fundamental Goals of Ontology); how its secondary mode of existence can be understood (IV. The Aesthetic Object and the Primacy and Secundarity of Existence); what light ontology as a theory of categories sheds on the aesthetic object (V. The Aesthetic Object and Ontology as a Theory of Categories); and what strata it has and to what extent they resemble the strata of the real world (VI. Strata of the Aesthetic Object and Strata of the Real World).

Discussions will revolve around these problem areas. These areas themselves could constitute the subject of separate and extensive treatises; however, the article's format necessitates a concise presentation, which has the advantage of presenting their content in a condensed manner.[2]

II. The Aesthetic Object and Being as What is as Such (Being Qua Being)

Initially, the question of whether the aesthetic object is a being seems easy to resolve. This object, whether as a work of art or, for example, as an aesthetically experienced landscape, possesses properties that create its determination and is endowed with a certain mode of existence. If we refer to Hartmann's considerations conducted in his work *Ontology: Laying the Foundations,* in which he addresses the fundamental question of "what is as such"[3] ("being qua being"[4]) in its

[2] A thorough presentation of Hartmann's problems of aesthetics, especially its multilayered relations to ontology, can be found in my monograph: *Ontologiczne podstawy estetyki. Zarys koncepcji Nicolaia Hartmanna* [The Ontological Foundations of Aesthetics: An Outline of Nicolai Hartmann's Conception] (Rzeszów: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Rzeszowskiego, 2008).

[3] Nicolai Hartmann, *Ontology: Laying the Foundations*, translation and introduction by Keith R. Peterson (Berlin/Boston: de Gruyter, 2019), 51.

[4] Keith R. Peterson, "Translator's Introduction. Hartmann's Realist Ontology," in Hartmann, *Ontology*, XXII.

essential structure, then he perceives this structure in the unity of two aspects or sides: determination—being something in the broadest sense of the word: *Sosein*, and existential—*Dasein*. Being in the most general sense is, therefore, for Hartmann, what somehow is and is something. He emphasises that "Being qua being is the unity of both."[5] Thus everything that is and that can be called being has two moments, linked by an ontological conjunction: *Sosein* and *Dasein*, so it is not surprising that we find these moments in individual entities. Therefore, we also find them in the aesthetic object.

Commenting on this most general structure of being, Forsche states that *Sosein* represents the totality of determinations of being, while *Dasein* refers to its existence[6]. Hartmann particularly emphasizes the mutual interdependence of these moments and their peculiar blending in being. "The ontological factors are not essentially different kinds of being, but two sides of the same entity that belong together."[7] Although they can be logically or methodologically separated—as Cicovacki[8] observes—they are not ontologically separate. Their description Hartmann considers to be one of the fundamental tasks of ontology.

Such general considerations about being as what is as such seem far removed from the problem of the aesthetic object. Moreover, they may deter a potential beholder of this object from attempting a theoretical understanding of its structure, since such understanding requires delving into the fundamental structure of being as what is as such. Not even "professional" aestheticians do this, as they focus rather on the aesthetic object itself, not on its possible relation to being as what is as such[9].

Meanwhile, grasping this relationship and asserting that every aesthetic object, containing within itself two moments: *Dasein* and *Sosein*, constitutes a cer-

[5] Hartmann, *Ontology*, 78.

[6] See Joachim Forsche, *Zur Philosophie Nicolai Hartmanns. Die Problematik von kategorialer Schichtung und Realdetermination* (Meisenheim am Glan: Hain, 1965 Monografien zur Philosophischen Forschung, Band XLI), 21.

[7] Hartmann, *Ontology*, 155.

[8] See Predrag Cicovacki, "New Ways of Ontology—the Ways of Interaction," *Axiomathes* 12, no. 3–4 (2001), Special Issue: *The Legacy of Nicolai Hartmann (1982–1950)* edited by Roberto Poli: 162. https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1015852024525.

[9] I analyze these relations in greater detail in my monograph: *The Ontological Foundations of Aesthetics*. See Mordka, *Ontologiczne*, 19–47.

tain variation of being, not only allows it to be included in ontological considerations, but also recognizes that an aesthetic object is not secondary and less significant in relation to being. Therefore, it allows to appreciate its peculiar ontological momentousness, if such a term can be used, and thereby significantly elevate its philosophical status as a form of true being. It also removes from the aesthetic object, especially from the work of art, the curse of appearance or illusion, as appearance is indeed the opposite of being. This is no small feat, as this curse has long defined the status of the aesthetic object, somewhat relegating it to the periphery of philosophical considerations.

Hartmann's ontology, at its foundations, does not evaluate the concept of being as what is as such, it does not declare then that this concept applies only to being in itself, it does not reduce the scope of this concept to real being or ideal being. It is an ontology open to those objects that have typically been considered mere semblance of true being. It is also a neutral ontology, meaning it does not advocate for a specific kind of being, making it fundamental or sometimes the only one. While one might question whether such neutrality and openness are possible, a question Samuel[10] resolves negatively, Hartmann clearly states that the sphere of being is one for all spheres of objects and entities.[11] If then "That which is, understood purely as what is, is evidently indifferent to difference between primary and secondary, independent and dependent,"[12] the aesthetic object is one of the forms of being.

III. The Aesthetic Object and the Fundamental Goals of Ontology

At the same time, however, some passages in Hartmann's writings suggest that he did not completely free himself from metaphysical biases, in which the aesthetic object, especially the work of art, is treated as subordinate (less significant) to real forms of being. Such valuation *seems* present in the very determina-

[10] See Otto Samuel, *A Foundation of Ontology. A Critical Analysis of Nicolai Hartmann* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1953), 33.

[11] Nicolai Hartmann, *Grundzüge einer Metaphysik der Erkenntnis*, dritte unveränderte Auflage (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1941), 57.

[12] Hartmann, *Ontology*, 71.

tion of the object of ontology research. In the work *Ontology: Laying the Foundations* Hartmann states that its purpose is: 1. to grasp the fundamental structure of being qua being; 2. to describe the sphere of being: real and ideal; 3. To characterize the modalities of being: actuality and possibility.[13] Particularly, the second point is significant in this regard because it does not mention the irreal sphere, characteristic of works of art. The absence of this sphere is emphasized by Collins.[14] According to him, by starting from the concept of being qua being, Hartmann primarily deals with two kinds of being: real and ideal.

Nevertheless, the absence of the irreal sphere can be explained not so much by a metaphysical bias harboured by Hartmann, but by a certain hierarchy of ontological priorities. Undoubtedly, explaining the structure of the real world must be recognized as a fundamental goal, if only because of its significance for humans, who, through ontological considerations, become aware of the place they occupy in the structure of this world. Considerations on this structure also show what human freedom entails, and even whether it is possible at all as a condition for moral action. Similar importance can be attributed to analyses of the ideal sphere, which also include ethical values. Therefore, ontology should first describe the two fundamental spheres: the real and the ideal, and only then address the irreal sphere, which has much less "generic weight." The ontological preference for the former does not therefore imply a metaphysical depreciation of the latter. The unreality of a work of art does not signify its metaphysical semblance.

Moreover, one may venture to suggest that ontological analyses of real and ideal being are first in this sense, as they provide a categorical preparation for the conceptualization of the structure and mode of existence of the aesthetic object. To delve properly into this structure, one must first possess a set of categories with a specified meaning, and such meaning gradually clarifies in research on real and ideal being. From this perspective, *Aesthetics* is not only Hartmann's final work, published posthumously, but also serves as a kind of culmination of this thinker's

[13] "Overall, we are dealing with the fact three pairs of opposites of very different structure and dimension have been conflated with one another and made nearly synonymous: 1. the ontological factors *Dasein* and *Sosein*; 2. the ontological spheres of reality and ideality; and 3. the ontological modes of actuality and possibility." Hartmann, *Ontology*, 130.

[14] See James Collins, "Neo-Scholastic Critique of Nicolai Hartmann," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 6, no. 1 (Sep. 1945): 112.

philosophical development. Such a suggestion is admittedly risky because it implies that aesthetic issues were the fundamental, albeit hidden, goal of Hartmann's philosophical journey; nevertheless, there is something to it.[15] After all, to explain the enigmatic unity of a work of art, as well as any objectivation, enigmatic because it is dual or twofold, established by two different ways of being: real and irreal (*Zweiheit der Seinsweisen*[16]), one must first consider the unity of different forms of real and ideal being, which, in this sense, is less complicated as its condition is the identity of the way of being.

However, these are only conjectures. It remains certain that the aim of ontological analyses should, sooner or later, become the aesthetic object. This goal is indirectly indicated in another work by Hartmann, *Der Aufbau der realen Welt*, in which he specifies the fundamental objects of ontology research. Ontology should: 1. grasp being as what is as such in its fundamental structure; 2. describe the individual domains of being in their specificity; 3. describe the various ways of presenting being.[17] These objects are therefore similar to those distinguished earlier, but differ in that Hartmann does not limit the individual domains to the real and ideal, nor does he name them specifically. Hence, one can infer that the aesthetic object, represented by a work of art, is on equal footing with real and ideal being, and aesthetic beholding, which presents it, is on equal footing with acts of cognition and other acts.

Aesthetics thus requires ontological grounding. However, such grounding involves not only discovering and describing the structure and way of being of the aesthetic object, as one discovers and describes the way of being of real or ideal being, but also revealing the connections between the aesthetic object and being as being qua being [being qua being].

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[15] In the Introduction to my Polish translation of Nicolai Hartmann's *Aesthetics*, I consider Hartmann's aesthetics to be "the crowning achievement of his philosophical journey." Artur Mordka, "Translator's Introduction" in Nicolai Hartmann, *Estetyka*, translated, introduced, and annotated by Artur Mordka (Rzeszów: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Rzeszowskiego, 2022), 13.

[16] Nicolai Hartmann, *Das Problem des geistigen Seins. Untersuchungen zur Grundlegung der Geschichtsphilosophie und der Geisteswissenschaften* (Berlin und Leipzig: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1933), 379.

[17] Nicolai Hartmann, *Der Aufbau der realen Welt. Grundriß der allgemeinen Kategorienlehre* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1940), 2.

IV. The Aesthetic Object and the Primacy and Secundarity of Existence

Such "ontological light" shining on the aesthetic object allows us to perceive its particular way of being and compare it with the real and ideal being. We encounter here a critical point in Hartmann's analyses, where he acknowledges that at least one type of aesthetic object—the work of art—has a secondary existence, while the primary existence belongs only to real and ideal being. Hartmann thus differentiates *Dasein*. He distinguishes three ways of being and accordingly: three spheres—real, ideal, and irreal, considering the first two as primary, and the third as derivative or secondary.[18]

Such differentiation is consistent with the fundamental direction of ontological considerations. For if at their highest level the object of analysis was what is as such, and *Dasein* constituted its essential moment, then at the lower level *Dasein* assumes a specific form, manifesting itself somewhat—as Löcher[19] and Cicovacki[20] put it—in reality, ideality, and irreality. In this sense, the differentiation of *Dasein* divides the individual spheres of being.[21]

Looking at this division from a metaphysical point of view, we receive an almost classic schema: what is primary is true existence, while what is secondary has the character of appearance. Although it also exists, it does so in a faded, secondary, or derivative manner. The work of art, therefore, would not be a being, but at most its illusion or inadequacy.

Hartmann repeatedly emphasized that the difference between ways of being is not metaphysical but ontological. These ways differ in specific moments, from which it cannot be inferred that one of them is true and the others are mere appearances. The difference between an entity that has primary being, and an object that has secondary being is ontological, not a metaphysical one. Primacy, for Hartmann, primarily means that something exists in itself, not "by the grace of" the subject. It is therefore autonomous and independent of any act, especially of the

[18] On the epistemological difference between the primacy and secundarity of existence see Mordka, *Ontologiczne podstawy estetyki*, 29–31.

[19] See Wolfgang Lörcher*, Ästhetik als Ausfaltung der Ontologie,* Monografien zur Philosohischen Forschung (Manheim am Glan: Hain, 1972)*,* 7.

[20] See Cicovacki, "New Ways of Ontology—the Ways of Interaction:" 162.

[21] "The ways of being are differentiated in terms of their *Dasein*, not their *Sosein.*" Peterson, "Translator's Introduction. Hartmann's Realistic Ontology", XXV.

act of aesthetic experience. Secundarity of something, on the other hand, indicates numerous and strong connections with the subject. The work of art is secondary in this sense, as it requires for its being a subject: the art lover, who not only admires it in their aesthetic beholding but also constitutes one of the conditions for its existence.

Not only the work of art is secondary in this way. So are all objects, including objects of cognition, which by their nature require for their being a subject as without acts directed towards them, they do not exist as objects. What is more, Breil[22] considers the cognitive relation to be the most important for secondary spheres, which gives the object of cognition a secondary character in relation to being.

The aesthetic object thus emerges victorious in this case as well. Its secondary existence does not remove it beyond the ontological boundaries of considerations about being. One might even argue that the mysteriousness of this existence poses a specific ontological challenge. For while much has already been said about real and ideal being, although their structure and mode of existence still pose and will likely continue to pose a problem, the ontology of the aesthetic object is essentially only at the beginning of its journey, groping somewhat blindly for the right method to achieve its goals. In this sense, Hartmann's *Aesthetics* constitutes a significant contribution to the development of the ontology of the aesthetic object.

Therefore, if we encounter in the considerations of this thinker a description of the structure and way of being of this object, in which there appear expressions such as secondary, dependent, existing by the grace of the subject, non-autonomous, and phenomenal etc., they do not have a pejorative character; they are not a metaphysical judgment but an ontological description. This is also the case with the thesis laid out this time in *Fundamentals of a Metaphysics of Cognition*: "the way of being of the aesthetic object constitutes the minimum of reality, while the way of being of the ethical and theoretical object shows the maximum of reality."[23] This minimum of reality does not imply ontological inferiority in relation to objects that have the maximum of reality but only that the aesthetic object is

[22] Reinhold Breil, *Kritik und System. Die Grundproblematik der Ontologie Nicolai Hartmanns in transcendenalphilosophischer Sicht* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1996), 79.

[23] Hartmann, *Grundzüge einer Metaphysik der Erkenntnis*, 213.

largely irreal, constituting the objectification of artistic vision which does not impose the requirement to be recognized as real.

A significant contribution of *Aesthetics* to the development of the ontology of the aesthetic object also lies in the striving to develop a set of categories through which its specificity can be described. We thus enter another problematic area, which concerns the determination of the object, as the goal of categorical analysis is, after all, to grasp something in its determination.

V. The Aesthetic Object and Ontology as a Theory of Categories

Hartmann's ontology is often regarded as a theory of categories, as expressed by Hartmann when he writes: "The meaning of the question about categories has already been specified. It asks about the ontological foundations, the constitutive principles of being. At the same time, however, it asks about the principles of knowledge, since these must necessarily be somehow connected with those."[24] This characterization of ontology is widely commented on in works dealing with Hartmann's philosophy, although the emphasis varies among them. Kuhn[25] considers categories not so much as certain types of predication, but directly as principles, and specifically as principles of being. Similarly, Kanthack[26] understands categories as fundamental determinations of being. Noras[27] emphasizes the dual understanding of ontology: 1. as a science of what is as such; 2. as a theory of a category aimed at describing the ontological structure of something. In all these commentaries, the categorical dimension of ontological considerations is emphasized. They are directed towards particular structures, operating at different levels

[24] "Der Sinn der Frage nach den Kategorien hat sich nunmehr präzisiert. Gefragt ist nach den ontischen Grundlagen, den konstitutiven Seinsprinzipien. Zugleich aber ist auch gefragt nach den Erkenntnisprinzipien, sofern diese mit jenen notwendig irgendwie zusammenhägen müssen." Hartmann, *Der Aufbau der realen Welt*, 41 (own translation).

[25] See Helmut Kuhn, "Nicolai Hartmann's Ontology," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 1, no. 4 (1951): 301.

[26] See Katharina Kanthack, *Nicolai Hartmann und das Ende der Ontologie* (Berlin: De Gruter, 1962), 69.

[27] See Andrzej J. Noras, *Nicolaia Hartmanna koncepcja wolności* (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 1998), 64.

of generality. Thus, Hartmann distinguishes between categories that are the most general principles of the real or ideal world, and special categories describing individual strata of this world.[28]

Understanding ontology as a theory of categories allows for the direct inclusion of aesthetic objects in ontological considerations. This object, whether as a real being, aesthetically experienced in acts of particular perception, or as a work of art, can be described by capturing its characteristic categories. From this perspective, Hartmann's *Aesthetics* is essentially a continuation of the categorical analysis of the real and ideal worlds, except that the object of this analysis is now the "aesthetic" world. Hartmann's conception of ontology thus allows for a smooth transition from describing one area of being to another, and then continuing this description in all possible areas of being and object.

Such a transition is possible because categories are indifferent to something's way of being. This way of being poses no obstacle to them, so the same categories can successfully be discovered in different, and even *any*, domains, as emphasized by Wein.[29] For example, unity as a fundamental category applies to material things, the psyche, the objective spirit, individual geometric objects, images, sculptures, etc. To reiterate, it is indifferent to the *Dasein* of entities and objects, and precisely because of this, it can be recognized in them.

Such recognition also provides an opportunity to compare various types of unity, and thus to grasp the specificity of individual entities and objects to which they belong. By delving into it, we can compare the unity of an aesthetic object with the unity of a real entity. Moreover, within aesthetic objects, we can grasp the various degrees of their unity. We can do the same within one and the same type of aesthetic object, such as painting, as the unity of, say, an impressionist painting differs from the unity of a cubist painting.

In this sense, ontology as a categorical analysis is rather an open project of ontological research, rather than a finished system. The openness of this project makes it possible, and even necessary, to include aesthetic objects in it. Moreover,

[28] For a characterization of the categories, their classification, as well as their role in "defining" the stratum, see Mordka, *Ontologiczne podstawy estetyki*, 31–48.

[29] See Hermann Wein, "Nicolai Hartmanns Kategorialanalyse und Idee einer Strukturlogik," in *Nicolai Hartmann. Der Denker und sein Werk. Fünfzehn Abhandlungen mit einer Bibliographie*, ed. by Heinz Heimsoeth and Robert Heiß (Göttingen: Vandenhoek & Ruprecht, 1952), 174.

precisely because of their peculiar way of being and structure, they constitute a particularly challenging cognitive task. Furthermore, Hartmann emphasizes that aesthetics is a relatively young philosophical discipline, so the content of its philosophical problems has not yet been fully developed.

It seems that one of the fundamental obstacles to realizing this project is the prevailing prejudice that since the aesthetic object is not a being, it can be somewhat marginalized in ontological reflection. However, the considerations conducted in part II of this article have shown that this object has *Sosein* and *Dasein* and thus falls under the concept of being, although it is certainly not a real or ideal entity, but an *object*. However, this only means that it does not exist in itself, but for us ("being in itself and being for us"),[30] which poses no obstacle to categorical analysis because ontological categories are indifferent to the ways of being and structures.

Although indifference is rarely a value, in this case, it is particularly valuable. Ontology as a categorical analysis establishes the goal of ontological analyses and delineates paths leading to it. It also allows for a deep penetration not only into the structure of the aesthetic object itself but also into its specific kind.

For Hartmann's considerations, it is characteristic that they encompass almost all kinds of works of art, from representational ones: painting, drawing, sculpture, and literature, to non-representational ones: music and architecture. They also encompass a multitude of real entities that, in the right setting, can become aesthetic objects: from the crystal in its structure, through biological and psychological entities to humans. Such a wide range of aesthetic objects is impressive and suggests, on the one hand, that perhaps there is no entity in the universe that could not have an aesthetic side, but on the other hand, it somehow requires presenting only its fundamental structure. Undoubtedly, it is not superficial, but it is certainly general. Hartmann does not delve too deeply into distinctions, does not engage in particular aesthetics, but rather in general aesthetics. Perhaps this was influenced by the belief that aesthetics as a field of philosophical knowledge should not approach concretum too closely if it is to remain a general theory of the aesthetic object.

Nevertheless, ontology understood as a theory of categories is well-suited to describe a particular type of work of art although this description would require

[30] See Hartmann, *Aesthetics,* 96–98.

appropriate modification of the "stratum" categories. This is the case, for example, with the category of the first stratum of a painting. According to Hartmann, this stratum is real, just like any physical thing, except that in the painting, it serves as its foundation, foreground, or sensory scene, where unreal senses of higher strata appear. In *Aesthetics*, he writes that it is "The level of the real elements, with visible specks of paint from the foreground." [31]

However, a deeper reflection on this stratum, which would also draw on the experiences of painters, would show that it is actually the plane as an intentional object created in the priming process, having a specific format, that creates its specific space. Furthermore, further studies on the plane, conducted by Kandinsky,[32] Arnheim[33] and Taranczewski,[34] reveal directional tensions present in it, which do not exist on the canvas understood as a physical surface, as Hartmann understands the plane. It therefore seems that ontological analyses of the plane should be supported by its phenomenological analyses.[35] Hartmann does not do this, which cannot be criticized in light of his conception. The scope of the aesthetic issues he addresses was so broad that detailed issues could not be addressed. However, his ontology clearly encourages analyses aimed not only at developing categories appropriate for a particular type of work of art but also at categories characteristic of its individual strata. Perhaps these analyses would also lead to a modification of the meaning of the concept of stratum.

[31] Ibid., 206.

[32] Wassily Kandinsky, *Punkt und Linie zu Fläche. Beitrag zur Analyze der malerischen Elemente*, mit einer Einführung von Max Bill (Bern: Benteli Verlag, 1973).

[33] See Rudolf Arnheim, *Art and Visual Perception. A Psychology of the Creative Eye* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004).

[34] See Paweł Taranczewski, *O płaszczyźnie obrazu* [On the Picture Plane] (Kraków: Zakład Narodowy imienia Ossolińskich Wydawnictwo, 1992).

[35] The problem of the structure and way of existence of the plane is currently the subject of my upcoming book: *Rozprawy o płaskości i płaszczyźnie obrazu. Strzemiński, Witkacy, Wolff, Taranczewski* [Discourses on Flatness and Plane of the Picture. Strzemiński, Witkacy, Wolff, Taranczewski].

VI. Strata of the Aesthetic Object and Strata of the Real World

This is not about its specification, but about a certain methodological procedure. Although in many commentaries on Hartmann's philosophy, the thesis is present that the concept of "strata"—due to its importance—should be more carefully described,[36] even though it is somewhat vague, it remains an effective tool in understanding the structure of the real world. It is also used in describing a work of art.[37] Hartmann distinguishes in it more strata, for example, in a painting there are seven of them, but this does not diminish their similarity to the four strata of the real world. In the final parts of his *Aesthetics*, Hartmann states that in a work of art, especially in a representational work, one can find the same strata that are present in the real world: physical, biological, psychological, and spiritual. The structure of a work of art therefore replicates to some extent and in various degrees the structure of the real world. It is mimetic in this specific ontological sense.

This similarity of structures can be explained in two ways: the artist, living in this world, portrays its contents in his work. It can also be explained by the fact that Hartmann applied a method already proven in aesthetics, having thus at his disposal a developed set of categories, established strata, and boundaries between them, as well as described laws that govern the real world. Such prepared ground allowed him to effectively describe the world of aesthetic objects, especially since one of them is, after all, a real entity: aesthetically perceived landscape, a person with their emotional life, an eagle soaring over the land, etc.

Reading *Aesthetics*, it is difficult to question the effectiveness of this method. However, due to the specific character of a work of art and the fact that it belongs

[36] See Roberto Poli, "The Basic Problems of the Theory of Levels of Reality," *Axiomathes* 12, no. 3–4 (2001), Special Issue: *The Legacy of Nicolai Hartmann (1982–1950)* edited by Roberto Poli: 264, https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1015845217681; Leszek Kopciuch, *Człowiek i historia u Nicolaia Hartmanna* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej, 2007), 30; Hans Theisen, *Determination und Freiheit bei Nicolai Hartmann* (Münster: Druck: Wasmmund, 1962), 52; Wolfgang Ruttkowski, "Schicht, Struktur und Gattung: Zusammenhang der Begriffe," *The German Quartely* 47, no. 1 (1974): 34.

[37] I attempt to demonstrate the artistic benefit of the philosophical concept of the stratum in the article "O artystycznym i estetycznym pożytku z kategorii warstwy. Przyczynek do ontologii działa sztuki Nicolaia Hartmanna" [On the Artistic and Aesthetic Benefit of the Category of the Stratum: A Contribution to Nicolai Hartmann's Ontology of the Work of Art], *Warstwy. Rocznik Instytutu Sztuk Pięknych Uniwersytetu Rzeszowskiego* 2018, no. 2: 6–13.

to the sphere of an irreal way of being, whose regularities seem significantly different from the regularities of the real world, one may ask whether imposing the "image" of the real world on a work of art is justified, or rather—while maintaining the concept of stratum—it would be necessary to develop its strictly artistic meaning. Kelly, in his introduction to the English translation of Hartmann's *Ästhetik*, notes the need for such articulation[38] of the concept of the stratum of a work of art, which in its meaning will differ from the meaning of the concept of stratum used in describing the real world. It can be added that a new articulation is also required for the hierarchy of strata of a work of art and the relationship between them. In Hartmann's aesthetics, this relationship is primarily determined by the relationship of appearance. The higher strata of a work appear through the lower ones, and as a consequence, the physical layer of a work, for example, the plane of a painting, is somewhat a sensory scene that reveals even the most spiritual idea. The harmony of this relationship of appearance constitutes beauty.

This organized way of thinking about the aesthetic object facilitates its understanding, but it assumes a similarity between real and artistic structures. However, this assumption is sometimes doubtful. If we consider, for example, representational paintings, the objects depicted in them are not so much certain painterly "entities" deriving their meaning from the real world, but rather components of composition deriving their artistic sense from the painterly form. They are its elements or parts, which changes their ontological and artistic status. It can then be argued that the fundamental stratum of a painterly work of art is not the stratum of depicted objects, but the layer of composition, and all other layers can be reduced to it. Therefore, it should appear first, and sometimes as the only one. Although Hartmann often wrote about form, emphasizing its importance, he never acknowledged form and its elements as a stratum.

He could not do this because his ontology of the work of art is strongly connected with the ontology of the real world, resulting in the transfer of the structure of this world onto the work of art. On the one hand, this has the positive effect that we can experience the true-to-life in the work of art, as it reveals this truth to

[38] "Perhaps a different articulation of strata in painting or sculpture is needed, for example the analysis of strata such materials (base, paint types), of the geometry of the construction of figure in space [...]." Eugene Kelly, "Translator's Introduction: Hartmann on the Mystery and Value of Art," in Hartmann, *Aesthetics,* XXXI.

us; on the other hand, the artistic truth suffers from it. Although Hartmann optimistically assumes the possibility of the coexistence of these truths, and masterpieces serve as his argument, it is nevertheless precisely in them that we see rather the predominance of artistic truth over the truth of life.

This strong connection between the ontology of the real world and aesthetics seems justified when the aesthetic object is the world itself or entities belonging to it. They are not human creations, so they have a real character, and in acts of aesthetic beholding, they are only perceived as aesthetic. Hartmann lists a whole spectrum of real entities that have an aesthetic aspect. He assumes their infinite multiplicity. Although detailed scientific knowledge is not required to experience the appearance of the crystal's structure or to feel the gracefulness in the leap of a squirrel or the sublimity of the cosmos, it strengthens this experience. It can be assumed that ontological knowledge of the structure of the real world also enhances it.

However, even in this case, a critical attitude towards the aesthetic phenomenon of the real world is required. Although in aesthetic beholding, we do not lose the sense of its reality and structures, sometimes they recede into the background or are even suspended. Form, on the other hand, comes to the fore. We can perceive a landscape as an entity with a specific organic structure, but we can also participate in its chromatic and graphic play. It then becomes a chromatic symphony rather than a collection of things. Therefore, we do not have to strictly adhere to real entities but can and should isolate those aspects of them that have the strongest aesthetic impact. The mentioned crystal then appears not so much as a physical entity with an aesthetic aspect but as a unity of lines creating a kind of graphic cosmos.

Imposing the structure of the real world on the aesthetic "world" can be seen as a shortcoming of Hartmann's theory. However, it is impossible to deny that the similarity of their structures brings these two worlds closer together, thus eliminating the ontological alienation of the work of art and, in effect, it is not perceived as something foreign to reality. Therefore, the problem is not the similarity itself but rather its degree. Answers are required to questions such as to what extent a work of art is similar in structure to the real world and in what ways it differs from it; which works of art have such similarity, which, on the other hand, constitute a kind of pure formal play; which strata of a given work of art relate to the world, and which ones maintain autonomy in relation to it. There are certainly many

more questions, but they are generated by the fundamental postulates of critical ontology, and therefore posed in the spirit of Hartmann's philosophy.

This similarity of structures not only weakens or even eliminates the alienation of the work of art but is also beneficial for the real world and people who, after all, also experience the world through works of art. Hartmann writes that, through them, they experience the true-to-life, albeit in a particular way: condensed, intensified and active. Moreover, a work of art does not burden them with truth; it only reveals it, not even demanding its acceptance. Unexpectedly, therefore, the above-mentioned criticized similarity of structures reveals its positive side.

VII. Closing Remarks. The Power of the Beautiful Being

The question considered in the preliminary parts of this article, whether the aesthetic object is a being, loses its initial peculiarity because its resolution determines not only the development of the ontological foundations of aesthetics but also the recognition of the knowledge of this object as a valuable goal of philosophical reflection. Hartmann's considerations show that it is by no means a mere appearance, and therefore not the opposite of truth, and cannot be relegated to some sort of metaphysical lowlands, but should find a worthy place for itself in the space of ontology and aesthetics. Hartmann's philosophy thus removes the curse of illusion from the aesthetic object, a curse that has long defined its status. The critical nature of this philosophy requires the development of categories that do the ontological and aesthetic justice to works of art and real objects that are aesthetically experienced.

Furthermore, it demonstrates and justifies the power of beauty. Beauty seems to be a value that disregards the boundaries between entities and differences in ways of being. The aesthetic being is not determined by a specific way of being, as the aesthetic object may be both an irreal work of art and an entity belonging to the real world, or even the ideal one. Nor does its position in the structure of this world determine its aesthetic being, as beauty can be found in what is, from an ontological point of view, the lowest, as well as in what is the highest.

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Streszczenie

Przedmiot estetyczny w świetle ontologii Nicolaia Hartmanna

W niniejszym artykule rozważam kwestię ontologicznego statusu przedmiotu estetycznego, którą sprowadza, do jednego problemu, dającego się wyrazić pytaniem: czy przedmiot estetyczny jest bytem? Problem ten ma oczywiście liczne implikacje, które omawiam w dalszej części artykułu. Przedstawione w nim analizy dotyczą: 1. miejsca obiektu estetycznego w rozważaniach ontologicznych, a zwłaszcza tego, czy stanowi on, na równi z bytem realnym i ideal-

nym, przedmiot badań ontologicznych; 2. jego egzystencjalnej specyfiki (drugorzędnej w stosunku do realności i idealności istnienia); 3. podobieństwa struktury obiektu estetycznego do struktury świata realnego.

Słowa kluczowe: ontologia, estetyka, realność, nierealność, byt, struktura, warstwa

Zusammenfassung

Das ästhetische Objekt im Lichte der Ontologie von Nicolai Hartmann

In diesem Artikel befasse ich mich mit der Frage nach dem ontologischen Status des ästhetischen Objekts, die ich auf ein einziges Problem reduziere, das sich mit folgender Frage ausdrücken lässt: Ist das ästhetische Objekt ein Wesen? Dieses Problem hat natürlich zahlreiche Implikationen, die ich im weiteren Verlauf des Artikels erörtern werde. Die darin vorgestellten Analysen betreffen: 1. den Platz des ästhetischen Objekts in ontologischen Überlegungen, insbesondere die Frage, ob es ebenso wie das reale und ideale Wesen Gegenstand ontologischer Untersuchungen ist; 2. seine existenzielle Besonderheit (die gegenüber der Realität und Idealität der Existenz zweitrangig ist); 3. der Ähnlichkeit der Struktur des ästhetischen Objekts mit der Struktur der realen Welt.

Schlüsselwörter: Ontologie, Ästhetik, Realität, Irrealität, Sein, Struktur, Schicht

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