

«Necessity» and «Destiny». Nicolai Hartmann and National Socialism

ANDREA SAIN

ABSTRACT

*The question of the alleged involvement of Nicolai Hartmann with National Socialism has often been circumscribed by critics to the famous “Magdeburg speech” given in October 1933. In this contribution, I would like to attempt to offer a broader overview that also considers the years following 1933. First, I start from emphasizing how the political ambiguity of Hartmann’s attitude can already be found in the 1933 text *Das Problem des geistigen Seins*. In the second instance, I propose a reading to understand Hartmann’s political behavior from a wider perspective, based on the concept of «necessity» and «destiny», two conceptual keys pervasively present both in his writings and in his unpublished letters.*

INTRODUCTION

The question Nicolai Hartmann’s (1882-1950) involvement with National Socialism has found its decisive theoretical cornerstone in the critical literature in the so-called “Magdeburg Speech” of October 1933, in which, by a resemblance of terminology close to that of National Socialism, Hartmann traced the advent and justification of Hitler’s dictatorship in the history of philosophy. However, the structural ambiguity of the Magdeburg speech left room for varying interpretations¹.

¹ Regarding the “ambiguity” of the Magdeburg speech see W. F. Haug, *Nicolai Hartmanns Neuordnung von Wert und Sinn*, in W. F. Haug (Hrsg.), *Deutsche Philosophen 1933*, Hamburg, Argument, 1989,

In this brief contribution, I would like to analyze some unpublished letters that I believe allow us to understand Hartmann's attitude towards National Socialism from a different and broader perspective. Unfortunately, we do not have many private letters in the years from 1933 to 1938. Therefore, I will focus on the analysis of some of Hartmann's letters from the period 1938-1946. I think that Hartmann's attitude is to be traced in an essential ambiguity of his thought, which I believe determined both the intellectual articulation of his philosophy and the conduct of his personal life. First of all, I would like to emphasize that Hartmann never expressed himself in racist or anti-Semitic terms, neither in his public writings nor in his private letters. Hartmann doesn't belong to the narrow circle of philosophers who were somehow closer to National Socialism². In the first section, I analyze the interpretative ambiguity of the 1933 book *Das Problem des geistigen Seins*. In the second section, I attempt to trace the ambiguity of Hartmann's thought in the concept of «necessity», which in private letters takes on the meaning of «destiny». In conclusion, I note how the apparently "neutral" concepts of Hartmann's ontology take on an inevitably political meaning, which has led to the recognition – by his contemporaries – to some «disturbing consequences» of Hartmann's political thought.

1. BEYOND THE SPIRITUAL BEING

Hartmann wrote the book *Das problem des geistigen Seins* during his time as a professor in Köln and it was finalized in August 1932, therefore it reflects the political crisis of Weimar. But in order to inherit Ernst Troeltsch's chair in Berlin in 1931, it was necessary to confront the humanistic tradition, and therefore the spiritual being. In the preface of the second edition, published in 1949, Hartmann wrote that the book did not receive a good reception precisely because of Nazism: «Spät kommt es zu dieser zweiten Auflage. Vor zehn Jahren wäre sie fällig gewesen, schon damals war das Buch ausverkauft. Aber ein Buch vom Geiste und seinem geschichtlichen Leben, von seiner Macht und Realität, war denen unerwünscht, die damals darüber entschieden, was deutsche Leser lesen sollten und was nicht»³.

It is worth noting, the book was received in diverse ways among scholars. Hans Freyer, an author notably close to the so-called «conservative Revolution», quoted Hartmann in the preface of the third edition of his *Theorie des objektiven*

p. 168; H. Sluga, *Heidegger's Crisis*, Harvard University Press, 1993, pp. 157-161; U. Kuchinsky, M. Schefczyk, «Grosse Dinge geschehen, man ist immerhin gewürdigt, sie zu erleben». Nicolai Hartmann und der Nationalsozialismus, in W. Konitzer (Hrsg.), «Arbeit» «Volk» «Gemeinschaft», *Ethik und Ethiken im Nationalsozialismus*, Frankfurt/New York, Campus Verlag, 2016, p. 93.

² See M. Leske, *Philosophen im «Dritten Reich»*, Berlin, Dietz Verlag, 1990, pp. 7-9.

³ N. Hartmann, *Das Problem des geistigen Seins*, Berlin, De Gruyter, 1949, p. V.

*Geistes*⁴. Even though Hartmann's book is abstract and written with a philosophical «distance» (*Distanz*) to the political events of the present⁵, the text is inevitably the child of his time. We will see later how the concept of «distance» is important to understand Hartmann's political disinterest even in relation to his political attitude. Here I do not want to dwell on the text's analysis but instead attempt to understand it by starting from an ambiguity in its political interpretation from the voices of scholars of his time⁶. In his lengthy review of the book, Plessner noted how Hartmann's analysis stood against all forms of reductionism. Plessner appreciated Hartmann's analysis precisely because, by not placing a metaphysical principle at the origin of the research, he let the phenomena decide (*die Phänomene entscheiden*). As Plessner wrote: «Nur das Heteronome in der Welt lässt sich nach Hartmann erklären. An das Autonome, und das sind die fundamentalen Seinsstrukturen, kann keine Theorie heran»⁷. In this sense, Plessner continues, Hartmann's analysis of the spirit takes us to a new land and allows us to discover all its different manifestations⁸. From an entirely different perspective, Otto Freidrich Bollnow gave his own political interpretation of the text. In his brief review Bollnow wrote: «Aufschlussreich ist vor allem die überzeugende Deutung des politischen Führers, die sich aus der Unpersonalität des objektiven Gesites ergibt [...]. Die Notwendigkeit des politischen Führers lässt sich so aus der Wesensstruktur des objektiven Geistes einsehen»⁹.

Why are the interpretations of this text so disparate? Was Plessner right in saying that Hartmann opened the research to the «Groundlessness» (*Bodenlosigkeit*) of philosophy¹⁰ – and therefore the absence of a strong and authoritative political thought – or Bollnow, who deduced the «necessity of the political Führer» by the «essential structure of spiritual being»? Hartmann's text left room for both interpretations. An excerpt of the book (§38 of *Das Problem of gesitigen Seins*) was published in a journal resembling National Socialist ideas «Natur und Geist»¹¹.

⁴ H. Freyer, *Theorie des objektives Gesites*, Darmstadt, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1966, p. III.

⁵ N. Hartmann, *Das Problem des geistigen Seins*, p. 33: «Das wissenschaftliche Geschichtsbewusstsein dagegen beginnt damit, sich zu alledem eine Distanz zu schaffen».

⁶ Regarding the different interpretations of the text see S. Kluck, *Nicolai Hartmanns Philosophie des Geistes im Spiegel der Rezensionen*, in: «Horizon», 8 (1) 2019, pp. 160-181.

⁷ H. Plessner, *Geistiges Sein. Nicolai Hartmanns Neues Buch*, in: «Kant-Studien» n. 38, 1933, p. 420.

⁸ Ivi, p. 413: «Immerhin, wir alle befanden uns in Amerika. Gesitiges Sein ist Boden, den wir bebauen, Luft, die wir atmen. Es ist das Vertraute, das Allzuvertraute und Alzzunahe, das entfernt und entfremdet sein will, um als Phänomen in den Blick zu kommen»

⁹ O. F. Bollnow, *Das geistige Problem des Seins. Untersuchungen zur Grundlegung der Geschichtsphilosophie und der Geisteswissenschaften von Nicolai Hartmann*, in: «Die Literatur», Vol. 36, 1933, p. 241.

¹⁰ H. Plessner, *Macht und menschlicher Natur*, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 2019, p. 229.

¹¹ U. Hossfeld, *Geschichte der biologischen Anthropologie in Deutschland*, Stuttgart, Franz Steiner, p. 327.

In this article entitled «Majorität und öffentliche Meinung», Hartmann analyzes the possibility of finding a criterion of truth for public opinion. In essence, the question is: how is democracy possible? First and foremost Hartmann acknowledges that the «majority principle» – on which democracy is founded – assumes that the individual is politically competent (*urteilsfähig*), yet the judgment of the individual – continues Hartmann – can only find expression in the party form.

Hartmann wonders: is there a criterion for establishing the truth of the totality of the multiplicity expressed by the different parties?¹² Here Hartmann is questioning whether through the democratic system the individual can be represented. At the same time, he recognizes that the democratic process starts from an unrealizable assumption: that everyone is politically competent, and that everyone is indeed democratic¹³. Since these conditions are not met, democracy can only be understood in its ideal expression. In this sense, the only way to understand democracy is as a real approximation (*Annäherung*) to its unrealizable idea. In conclusion, the only way to avoid the «dead end of the majority principle» (*aus der Sackgasse des Majoritätsprinzip*) consists at the same time in the «greatest danger to the state» (*die höchste Gefahr für den Staat*): entrusting power to the «statesman»¹⁴.

We understand how Hartmann perceives the structural instability of democracy, and the need for a statesman to stand above it. In a note to the text, found in the book, not in the article, Hartmann writes: «it is a highly instructive fact that every form of government built most clearly on the majority principle, and which has executed the council system, has practically stayed furthest from these principles. Dictatorship has replaced it»¹⁵. In this sense, we can understand Hartmann's attitude immediately after Hitler's seizure of power. The statesman must rise above public opinion. In a 1933 self-presentation Hartmann wrote: «Gerade darum aber muss umgekehrt der Führer selbst zu allererst sich freimachen von der öffentlichen Meinung, über sie hinauswachsen»¹⁶. In his Magdeburg speech¹⁷ Hartmann explained how «the idea of the political Führer» (*die Idee des politischen*

¹² N. Hartmann, *Majörität und öffentliche Meinung*, in: «Natur und Geist», Bd. 1, Heft 5, 1933, p. 131: «Wo bleibt in der Herrschaft der Majoritäten das Echte und Eigentliche des objektiven Geistes?».

¹³ Ivi, p. 132: «[...] es ist im Grunde ein Ideal: jeder soll politisch unteilbar und jeder soll überparteilich gesinnt sein. Das Ideal ist aber nicht erreichbar».

¹⁴ Ibidem.

¹⁵ N. Hartmann, *Das Problem des geistigen Seins*, p. 350: «Es ist in diesem Zusammenhang eine höchst belehrende Tatsache, dass gerade diejenige Regierungsform, die am eindeutigsten auf der Majorität aufgebaut ist und das Rätssystem am prinzipiellsten durchgeführt hat, praktisch am weitesten von ihr abgekommen ist. Die Diktatur hat sie ersetzt».

¹⁶ N. Hartmann, *Systematische Selbstdarstellung*, in *Kleinere Schriften I*, Berlin, De Gruyter, p. 35.

¹⁷ Regarding the context of the speech see T. Laugstein, *Philosophie-Verhältnisse im deutschen Faschismus*, Hamburg, Argument, 1990, pp. 127-130.

Führers) was to be found in the philosophical tradition, precisely in Hegel¹⁸. How will Hartmann's political behavior appear from 1933 onwards? How will he interpret history at the heart of its darkest moment?

2. NECESSITY AND ACTUALITY

The ambiguity of Hartmann's attitude - which continues in the following years - is to be found in the concepts of «destiny» and «necessity». In particular, the idea of destiny (*Schicksal*) is the great protagonist of the private letters, revealing its importance both on a philosophical and psychological-personal level. In an unpublished private letter, Hartman describes his own personality in these terms: «A certain amount of general skepticism about life, tempered by the gift of being able to wring the best part out of any situation, has allowed me to navigate through so-called 'fates' (*die sogenannte Schicksale*) with ease»¹⁹. In 1931, following the refusal of Martin Heidegger, Hartmann assumed the prestigious chair at the University of Berlin²⁰. He will then write to psychiatrist and friend Kurt Schneider: «The fact that I had to get involved in this colossal Berlin affair is a great misfortune for me (*Missgeschick*); you will understand that I could not refuse. We must take our destiny upon ourselves (*man muss seine Schicksale auf sich nehmen*), we have no choice. Only on which side we decide to compromise, in that we have a choice»²¹. The idea of destiny fills Hartmann's private letters. What implications does this idea of destiny have for the interpretation of the historical events of his present? What political consequences does this perspective lead to? Let us remember that Hartmann was a professor at the prestigious University of Berlin from 1931 to 1945, and the political centrality of this university made the implementation of an absolute political neutralism difficult²².

The central role of the concept of necessity will find its highest expression in the text *Possibility and Actuality* (*Möglichkeit und Wirklichkeit*) published in

¹⁸ N. Hartmann, *Sinngebung und Sinnerfüllung*, in *Kleinere Schriften I*, Berlin, De Gruyter, p. 257.

¹⁹ DLA Marbach (N. Hartmann to P. Wust 10.04.1924): «Eine gewisse Dosis allgemeiner Lebensskepsis, gemildert durch die Gabe, jeder Situation goldene Seiten abzugewinnen, hat mich die sogenannte Schicksale stets leicht empfinden lassen».

²⁰ Regarding Hartmann's transfer to Berlin see A. Schölzel, *Zur Tätigkeit Nicolai Hartmanns an der Berliner Universität*, in: «Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin», 1984.

²¹ DLA Marbach (N. Hartmann to K. Schneider 20.07.1931): «Dass ich mich in den riesenhaften Berliner Betrieb hereinwagen musste, ist für mich ein Missgeschick; dass ich nicht ablehnen konnte - bei der Sachlage des faches in Berlin - werden Sie ebenso verstehen. Man muss seine Schicksale auf sich nehmen, da hat man keine Wahl. Nur nach welchen Seiten man seine Compromisse macht, darin hat man die Wahl».

²² In this sense, it seems difficult to argue only for «inner immigration», as it has been proposed in W. Harich, *Nicolai Hartmann. Der erste Lehrer*, Baden-Baden, Tectum, 2018, p. 145.

1938, in which Hartmann argues that the mode of real actuality, and therefore of the real historical happening, is indissolubly linked to necessity (*Notwendigkeit*)²³. In opposing the empty Aristotelian conception of possibility, Hartmann regains Diodorus Crono's argument on modalities²⁴. The ultimate consequence consists in the affirmation that the «actuality» is somehow closely connected to the modality of «necessity». As Oskar Becker wrote in his review of Hartmann's text: «denn es ist in der Tat das Kennzeichen der Realität, dass in ihr durchgängig die Notwendigkeit in ihrer positive wie im negative Form allein herrscht. Es ist eben die völlig determinierte "stoische" Welt in die wir eintreten»²⁵.

I do not want to enter into the specific analysis of the modalities carried out by Hartmann²⁶, but only to underline the ontological asymmetry between «ideality» and «reality» that Hartmann arrives at. Precisely because the real, in its connection with necessity, finds no room for the casual²⁷, reality reveals itself to be the strongest being: «ideales Seins ist ein unvollständiges Sein, ein im bloss Allgemeinen verharrendes, im Verhältnis zum Realen nicht das höhere, sondern das nieder ist»²⁸. While on one side we have the real being, which is always the perfect being²⁹, on the other side we have the ideal being, which is constantly imperfect, due to the fact that it cannot enter into the chain of conditions of reality. Although Hartmann acknowledges the total independence and autocracy (*Alleinherrschaft*) of the ideal being, he also recognizes that this «autocracy is totally weightless» (*aber die Alleinherrschaft ist gewichtlos*)³⁰.

Are there political consequences of such an ontology of the real? Hartmann himself gave a political interpretation of this concept in a letter directed to Gerhard Lehmann, an author very close to the regime:

I look at it this way: my second volume consists of an attempt to continue the line of German systematic philosophy in a new way [...]. Still in Neo-Kantianism the

²³ N. Hartmann, *Möglichkeit und Wirklichkeit*, Berlin, De Gruyter, 1966, §20.

²⁴ Ivi, §22.

²⁵ O. Becker, *Das formale System der ontologischen Modalitäten*, in: "Blätter für deutsche Philosophie", Bd. 16, Heft 4, 1943, p. 400.

²⁶ For a logical critique of Hartmann's modalities which follows in part Becker's review see G. Seel, *Die Aristotelische Modaltheorie*, Berlin, De Gruyter, 1982, pp. 1-134.

²⁷ N. Hartmann, *Möglichkeit und Wirklichkeit*, p. 322: «Das Reale kennt innerhalb seine Grenzen den Zufall nicht, es ist ein einziger geschlossener Zusammenhang durchgehender Determination».

²⁸ Ivi, p. 321.

²⁹ As Erst von Aster wrote in reference to Hartmann: «Reales Sein ist volleres, gewissermassen eigentlicheres Sein»; see E. von Aster, *Philosophie der Gegenwart*, Neudruck der 1935 Ausgabe, Leiden, A. W. Sijthoff, 1967, p. 99.

³⁰ N. Hartmann, *Möglichkeit und Wirklichkeit*, p. 197; also in Hartmann, *Zur Grundlegung der Ontologie*, p. 291: «Das Ideale Sein ist, verglichen mit dem Realen, das geringere Sein».

“systems” have dominated. We stand in the great reaction against them. Philosophy must not build castles in the air. Philosophy must not pretend to deal with timeless things. [...]. I have already anticipated the consequences in my *Ethics*: no false fear of “power of such”. Also in *The Problem of spiritual being*: “historical autonomy of a popular-objective spirit (*völkisch-objektiven Geistes*)”. [...]”³¹.

What implications can we draw from this letter? First, we note how Hartmann’s distancing of himself from Neo-Kantianism was not politically innocent. Although Hartmann publicly distanced himself, for purely theoretical reasons, from Marburg Neo-Kantianism with his 1921 text³², this separation had political implications in the following years. During the thirties, Marburg Neo-Kantianism was attacked because its founder, Hermann Cohen, was Jewish. In this sense, Neo-Kantian formalism was considered – by authors close to Nazism – a highly abstract philosophy and an enemy of “German science”³³. When Gerhard Lehmann attempted to enter the University of Berlin in 1939, the topic of the trial lecture was the German Kantian movement (*die deutsche Kantbewegung*). Lehmann classified the Neo-Kantian school as mere Jewish logicism³⁴. Hartmann, who was on the judging committee, gave Lehmann a positive assessment. Secondly, we note that Hartmann gives his own political interpretation of his philosophy: the idea of necessity is immediately linked to the problem of spiritual being. In particular, the idea of the «historical autonomy of a popular objective spirit» (*völkisch-objektiven Geistes*), which was the subject of the 1933 text *Das Problem des geistigen Seins*. In this sense, we can understand some expressions very close to Hegel from the Magdeburg Speech, in which Hartmann said: «the idea of the political Führer is rooted in the objective spirit, in the substance of the present»³⁵.

³¹ DLA Marbach (N. Hartmann to G. Lehmann 11.07.1938): «So sehe ich es: mein zweiter Band ist der Versuch, die Linie der deutschen systematischen Philosophie in neuartigen Weise fortzusetzen [...]. Noch im Neukantianismus haben die “Systeme” geherrscht. Wir stehen in die grosse Reaktion dagegen. Philosophie soll nicht Luftschlösser bauen. Sie soll auch nicht vorspiegeln, zeitlose Dinge zu treiben: aus ihre Zeitlange heraus die Probleme angreifen soll sie, so wie diese spruchreif geworden sind. [...]. Darum die ungeheure Mühsal der Möglichkeitsanalyse. Hier liegt ein über zweitausendjährigesvururteil – nicht nur der Spekulation, sondern erst rech der Lebenseinstellung. [...]. Die Konsequenzen habe ich schon vor Jahren in meiner Ethik vorweggenommen: keine falsche Angst vos das leere “So oder so können”. Ebenso im “Problem des geistigen Seins”: geschichtliche Autonomie eines völkisch-objektiven Geistes bedeutet etwas ganz anders als das Herder-Hegelsche Anlageprinzip. [...]».

³² N. Hartmann, *Grundzüge einer Metaphysik der Erkenntnis*, Berlin und Leipzig, De Gruyter, 1921.

³³ See U. Sieg, ‘Deutsche Wissenschaft’ und Neukantianismus. *Geschichte einer Diffamierung*, in: H. Lehmann & O.G. Oexle (Hrsg.), *Nationalsozialismus in den Kulturwissenschaften. Bd. II: Leitbegriffe, Deutungsmuster, Paradigmenkämpfe*, Göttingen, 2004 pp. 199-222.

³⁴ C. Tilitzki, *Die deutsche Universitätsphilosophie in der Weimarer Republik und im Dritten Reich*, Berlin, Akademie Verlag, 2002, p. 708: «Lehmann [...] klassifizierte jetzt aber die neukantianischen Schulen rassenideologisch und grenzte den “blossen Logizismus” der “judischen Vertreter der Marburger Schule” als zur “judischen Geistesgeschichte” gehörig aus der deutschen Kantbewegung aus».

³⁵ N. Hartmann, *Sinngebung und Sinnerfüllung*, p. 257.

We can also understand Hartmann's general attitude, which consists in a passive acceptance of the historical happening of his present, a sort of fatalism (*Schicksalhaftigkeit*)³⁶, even if the reality of the present manifests its contradiction towards the ideal structures of justice and equality, as for example, in the case of anti-Semitism. When Gerhard Lehmann sent Hartmann the book *Die deutsche Philosophie der Gegenwart*, published in 1943, which in its intentions stood closely to National Socialism, Hartmann noticed some important absences in the text. For example, despite being two of the most important Jewish philosophers in Germany in the early twentieth century, Cohen's name does not appear, while Husserl is only briefly evoked in polemical terms³⁷. In his reply Hartmann can only acknowledge that it is the conditions of the reality of the historical moment that dominate: «Where you have left gaps, they are conditioned by the circumstances of our time - for example, phenomenology as a cohesive group is treated too hastily; but they are predominantly Jews, and there is nothing to be done about it»³⁸.

There is one last letter I would like to propose in order to understand the ambiguity of Hartmann's attitude. In March 1939 when Hartmann writes to his friend Joseph Münzhuber about the situation at the University of Berlin, Hartmann expresses his intolerance for some authors who were close to the ideological structures of National Socialism, such as Alfred Baeumler, with whom Hartmann established a sort of rivalry at the University of Berlin from 1930. In Berlin, Baeumler began a "politicization of the student youth", and the plan was to attempt to put an end to Hartmann's fatal influence on students³⁹. In the first part of the unpublished letter, Hartmann explains that in Berlin, Alfred Baumlér had the role of a "political lookout" (*Politischer Aufpasser*) and that in his eyes, older philosophers such as Hartmann and Eduard Spranger were considered to be "liberal":

In 1933 Alfred Baeumler was transferred here as a full-time professor. He plays the role of the political outlook for the so-called "ideological department", and he is an obvious opponent of us old-fashioned people, Spranger and I. In his eyes we are liberals, we are entirely superfluous and yet temporarily tolerated⁴⁰.

³⁶ N. Hartmann, *Zur Grundlegung der Ontologie*, p. 166.

³⁷ G. Lehmann, *Die deutsche Philosophie der Gegenwart*, Stuttgart, Alfred Kröner Verlag, 1943, pp. 300-307.

³⁸ DLA Marbach (N. Hartmann to G. Lehmann 02.04.1944): «Wo Sie dabei Lücken gelassen haben, da sind diese durch die Zeitumstände bedingt – so ist z. B. die Phänomenologie als geschlossene Gruppe zu kurz gekommen; aber sie sind eben vorwiegend Juden, und da ist nun nicht zu machen».

³⁹ C. Tilitzki, *Die deutsche Universitätsphilosophie in der Weimarer Republik und im Dritten Reich*, p. 549.

⁴⁰ DLA Marbach (N. Hartmann to J. Münzhuber 15.04.1939): «Seit 1933 ist Alfred Baeumler hierher als Ordinarius veretzt. Er spielt die Rolle des politischen Aufpassers für die so. "weltanschauliches

In the second part of the letter, however, Hartmann writes specifically about the historical moment:

So, regarding the «disgusting century»: doesn't it seem to you, that only «we» are on the dark side (*Schattenseite*)? When I say «we» I mean old-fashioned people, academics, scientists, and a few others who can breathe free? History doesn't follow the path of reason (*nicht den Weg der Vernunft*), but the path of necessity (*Not*). «Great things» happen, and one is always grateful to experience them; one is also forced to appreciate them. It's not easy if you're on the side of the neutralized and the superfluous. These happenings neglect their life perspectives, which were ones different [...]. Have you ever read Ranke's great historical works? You're able to distance yourself from everything and learn something about justice that otherwise only epigones can have. It is not easy to be in this eternal "tua res agitur". But we must. We must, in spite of everything, not ignore. Otherwise, we would be where the Jews are⁴¹.

What implications are allowed to be drawn from the letter? Once again, we find the affirmation of the necessity of historical happening: History doesn't follow the path of reason (*nicht den Weg der Vernunft*), but the path of necessity (*Not*). In this sense, Hartmann attributes the role of philosophy as a rational attempt to justify the irrationality of the historical present: «“Great things” happen, and one is always grateful to experience them; one is also forced to appreciate them». When Hartmann speaks of “great things,” he is obviously referring to the political events of 1939⁴². But on the other hand, Hartmann recognizes that he finds himself on the shaded side (*auf den Schattenseite*) of history, and in this sense, he feels a moral responsibility: «it's not easy if you're on the side of the superfluous and the neutralized».

Fächer” und ist natürlich der Gegner von uns Leuten alten Schlages, Spranger und mir. In seinen Augen sind wir “Liberalisten”, sind gänzlich überflüssig und nur nicht einwillen geduldet».

⁴¹ DLA Marbach (N. Hartmann to J. Münzhuber 15.04.1939): «Sodann, was das “wiederliche saeculum” anlangt: scheint Ihnen nicht, dass nur «wir» auf den Schattenseite stehen? Mit “wir” meine ich die Leute alten Schlages, Akademiker, Wissenschaftler und einiges mehr, was eben nur in grösserer Freiheit atmen kann? Die Geschichte geht nun einmal nicht den Weg der Vernunft, sondern der Not. Grosse Dinge geschehen, man ist immer gewürdigt, sie zu erleben, ist auch verpflichtet, sie zu würdigen. Das ist nicht leicht, wenn man bei den Ausgeschalteten und Überflüssigen steht, über deren einst anders angelegte Lebensperspektive dieses Geschehen hinweggeht. [...]. Haben Sie einmal Rankes grosse Geschichtswerke gelesen? Man gewinnt daraus Distanz gegen alles und lernt etwas von der Gerechtigkeit, die sonst nur der Epigone haben kann. Es ist nicht leicht, sich in das ewige “tua res agitur” zu finden. Aber wir dürfen. Aber wir dürfen es trotz allem nicht verkennen. Sonst stünden wir ja wirklich dort, wo die Juden stehen».

⁴² U. Kuchinsky, M. Schefczyk, «Grosse Dinge geschehen, man ist immerhin gewürdigt, sie zu erleben». *Nicolai Hartmann und der Nationalsozialismus*, p. 102: «Wir verstehen dies so, dass sich Hartmann mit der Rede von den “grossen Dingen” im Frühjahr 1939 auf die Konsolidierung und Ausdehnung des NS-Regimes bezieht: Entrechtung der Juden, aussenpolitische Aggression, die Opposition in Konzentrationslager [...]».

But in the end, the concept of «distance», to which Hartmann attributes a fundamental function, allows him to attempt to justify the evil of his present. We recall that in his 1933 text Hartmann affirmed that the concept of distance and objection (*Objektion*) makes it possible not only to establish the principle of scientific knowledge, but also the anthropological difference that distinguishes man from animal. Precisely because knowledge is a relationship of transcendence with the object, the animal is not able to place the proper distance between itself and the object. For the chimpanzee, the banana is only for him, while the man, the spiritual consciousness, is able to assume distance from the object⁴³. But does the concept of «distance» therefore allow one to rise from the «dark side of history» to get closer to the «neutralized» and the «superfluous», to not «ignore» (*verkennen*) what was happening to the Jews, or is it only a pretext to interpret and appreciate (*würdigen*) in an objective way the great historical events, the «great things» that, even in evil, were happening? This letter, full of ambiguity, on one hand shows us how Hartmann recognized the ideal injustice of what was happening, but on the other hand reveals Hartmann's immobility and inability to react concretely. Even while recognizing the autonomy of the ideal structure of the idea, Hartmann will always preclude the idea from the power of modifying the necessity of reality.

CONCLUSION

I would like to highlight some problematic issues in Hartmann's philosophical system: it is possible to read the historical present only through the category of the necessity of the reality? What about the status of the idea, which in Hartmann's philosophical system will always find a marginal position? If the historical present always proves necessary, what is the role of the ideal being within history? In conclusion, returning to the 1933 text *Das Problem des geistigen Seins*, I would like to point out that it was a historian, Gerhard Ritter, who grasped how Hartmann's tendency to justify the reality of the historical present at any cost is a thought that would lead to «disturbing consequences». Commenting Hartmann's Paragraph of *The Problem of Spiritual Being*, dedicated to the relation on power (*Macht*) and justice (*Recht*), in which Hartmann wrote that «a right without power is not a valid right»⁴⁴, Ritter wrote to Hartmann:

⁴³ N. Hartmann, *Das Problem des geistigen Seins*, p. 120: «Der Schimpansee also, der nur das Für-ihm-sein des Begehren als solchen fasst, bringt es nicht dazu, dass die Banane, was sie an sich ist, auch für ihn sei. Das geistige Bewusstsein dagegen, das gegen das Begehrtsein Distanz hat, bringt es ohne weiteres dazu, etwas von den Bestimmtheiten, die an sie an sich hat, zu fassen».

⁴⁴ Ivi, p. 274: «Ein Recht ohne Macht ist nicht geltendes Recht».

I am particularly disturbed by the way you seem to derive the origin of law (*der Ursprung des Rechtes*) exclusively from the general convictions of a time and a people. We all experience today with our own skin, what disturbing consequences (*unheimliche Konsequenzen*) can this lead to. Is it really possible to build a juridical system without reference to the supertemporal validity of values? Isn't justice itself (*Gerechtigkeit*) an ethical concept, elevated in its core by every change of opinion in a historical time?⁴⁵.

Although Hartmann never explicitly commented on the historical events of his present, certain seemingly “neutral” philosophical concepts take the form of a political reading if they are placed in their historical contexts. When Hartmann is apparently speaking about ontology, he is actually trying to rationally justify – through philosophical concepts – his historical present. Even though Hartmann doesn't express his own philosophy in a biologicistic racism or anti-Semitism, and he does not belong to the narrow circle of philosophers who were closer to National Socialism, his theoretical system led him to a passive acceptance of the historical present through the concepts of «destiny» and «necessity». I think it is only in this sense that we can understand the apparently conflicting judgment that the security service (*Sicherheitsdienst*) gave, according to which Hartmann is considered to be politically uninterested, and yet at the same time «loyal to National Socialism»⁴⁶.

⁴⁵ K. Schwabe, R. Reichart (Hrsg.), *Gerhard Ritter, Ein politischer Historiker in seinen Briefe*, Boppard am Rhein, Haraldt Boldt Verlag, 1984, (G. Ritter to N. Hartmann 01.10.1936), p. 305: «Insbesondere beängstigt mich die Art, wie Sie in den Kapitel 28 den Ursprung des Rechtes ausschliesslich aus dem gemeinsamen Rechtsüberzeugung einer Zeit bzw. einen Volkes abzuleiten scheinen. Zu welchem unheimlichen Konsequenzen das führen kann, erleben wir ja alle heute sozusagen am eigenen Leibe. Ist es wirklich möglich, ein vernünftiges Rechtssystem ohne Bezugnahme auf die überzeitliche Gültigkeit Werte zu konstruieren? Ist Gerechtigkeit nicht selbst zuletzt ein ethischer Begriff, in seinem Kern allem Wandel zeitlicher Meinungen enthoben?».

⁴⁶ G. Leaman, G. Simon, «*SD über Philosophie*», <<https://homepages.uni-tuebingen.de/gerd.simon/philosophendossiers.pdf>>, p. 24: «Politisch? Von jeher national. Loyal gegenüber dem Nationalsozialismus. Ohne politische Aktivität, aber durchaus sozial eingestellt».