NICOLAI HARTMANN'S VALUES OF PERSONALITY:
A CRITICAL STUDY

FREDERICK KRAENZEL

Nicolai Hartmann's doctrine of the values of personality is his most original contribution to the philosophy of values.¹ It is perhaps the first detailed philosophical theory of what modern common sense recognizes as one of the most obvious and important realms of value. But like many newly glimpsed ideas, it is rich in confusions and difficulties.

Personality is what distinguishes the individuality of one person from the individuality of another (Ethik, Chap. 57, sec. a). A person is a free being which is conscious of values and able to realize them by purposive action (cf. op. cit., 19f). Personality is the qualitative difference between persons. What is primarily meant here is not particular personality features, but the individuality of the whole configuration of a person. Each personality is by definition unique, and as a matter of real fact each person has a different personality (57d). Further, an important point is that every personality has a different value: “every individual has his own for himself” (57b; 57c, d). This value is not just quantitatively different from the values of other personalities, it is qualitatively different. Hence values of personality form an “inestimable multiplicity of values” (57a); they “make up the greatest contingent of the colorful crowd of values everywhere in life” (57b). Hartmann does not make it perfectly clear, however, that his object is to explore the moral values of personality, and not all values of personality. Moral value is the value which belongs to a person in that he freely chooses to realize values which he can intend (38a, 19f-g). Personalities may also have aesthetic value and value as means; they may be worth having or being acquainted with (i.e. they may have Güterwert or goodsvalue); and they have dignities which are not moral, because the person cannot freely choose or refuse them. Because Hartmann’s task is the investigation of moral value, one would assume that the colorful crowd of values of personality here treated are moral values. I think this position leads to many confusions, which I shall discuss in due course.

Another essential thing to notice is that Hartmann’s concern is largely with ideal personalities and their value, not with the realized values of actual personalities. At times, Hartmann even gives the impression that he is solely

¹ N. Hartmann, Ethik, Berlin, 4th ed., 1962, esp. Chapter 57. References are to chapter and section numbers of this book, e.g. 57a, 19f. These are the same in all editions and in Stanton Coit’s English translation (Ethics, London and New York, 1932, vols. 1-2). If the reference is to a segment of a section, and the section is longer than two pages, a page reference to the fourth German edition is usually also given. Ethik was first published in Berlin in 1926 and never later revised.
Discussions

concerned with the value of a person's "ideal ethos" (e.g. 57b, p. 511). This impression is misleading. An ideal ethos is the measure of the moral value of a real personality (57b). Each person's ideal ethos, or intelligible character, also has its own value (57f, g). The moral value of a personality "can be described with complete unambiguity as the fulfillment of the intelligible character in the empirical person" (57b, p. 512).

What is a person's "ideal ethos"? A person strives, by his free choice, to realize goods. This striving consists in such things as a way of thinking, a value outlook, decisions, intentions, and actions. This purposive way of living is a person's ethos. An ethos is ideally determined, and maximally valuable, when a person engages himself fully for the highest values that he can realize.

This, in fact, is Hartmann's definition of moral goodness (cf. 39h, p. 384-386). It is not at first clear how this formula leaves room for personal differences, still less allows them value (57e, p. 518-519). Hartmann clears an area for values of personality by asserting that each person has a personal value consciousness, to which certain values appear more compelling or attractive than they appear to other persons (57f, h). This "individuality of value orientation" (57f) appears most clearly as a well-defined personality. Such a person "shows very definite, undivertible (unbeirrbare) sympathies and antipathies, of which he can give no account except their presence and their sensed necessity" (ibid.). In spite of Hartmann's insistence on the actual uniqueness of each personality, he believes that not everyone has such a definite personal value consciousness and personality. It is also possible for persons to be little different from many other individuals. There is a possible continuum of personal essences ranging from the quite typical to the outstandingly unique (57e, p. 519; 57f).

What else goes into an ideal ethos? Hartmann does not fill in his sketch further, but it is obvious that a value consciousness by itself is not yet an ethos. It needs engagement before it develops a way of thinking and doing, a lasting orientation in action. The kind of real situation in which a person can expect to find himself must therefore play a part. Now since an ideal ethos is very highly individual, it can hardly be determined by typical situations. The ideal ethos of a person must then be the reaction of his value consciousness to the actual situations in which he lives.

How is the individuality of ideal ethoi consistent with engaging oneself for the highest realizable value? Hartmann's answer is that although in each situation any value has a definite height relative to every other value, there are a great many values of the same height in the situation (57e). If there is a difference in height among these values, we cannot perceive it; they seem equal to us. Hence there are a great many different ways of being morally good in most situations. An ideal ethos must of course be morally good, or it could not be the foundation and measure of the moral value of a real personality. Hartmann does not consider the fact that personal sympathies often find the lower values in a situation compelling or attractive. Faust and Macbeth act on personal value sympathies, in Hartmann's sense.