THE VALUE OF MAN IN THE HARTMAN VALUE SYSTEM

Rem B. Edwards

My esteemed colleague and personal friend Robert S. Hartman has produced and published in *The Structure of Value* and numerous journal articles what I regard as the most brilliant, creative, and promising scheme of "metaethics" and formal axiology produced in our century. The explorations of value concepts and the logic of normative discourse produced by such thinkers as G. E. Moore, A. J. Ayer, Charles Stevenson, R. M. Hare and so many others are pale in significance by comparison with Hartman's system of formal axiology. It is because I respect it so much that I wish to attack aspects of it in this article, hoping that some more ultimate clarity and adequacy will eventually emerge from the discussion.

For present purposes, we shall divide the Hartman scheme into two parts: A) a *formal system* of axiology in which basic value concepts, including the concept of "value" itself, are defined in formal terms, in which a hierarchy of value concepts is propounded, and in which axiological inter-relationships are explored, and so on; and B) *suggested application* of the formal system. My present difficulties focus primarily around the application of the system which Professor Hartman wishes to sponsor. In its suggested application, the Hartman value system yields the following hierarchy of evaluations, based on the principle that "Richer in qualities" is the definition of "better," "poorer in qualities" is the definition of "worse." [1]

1) Formal systems and abstractions are of finite value, since they consist of a finite number of properties. Their characteristic number is some finite cardinality. They are exhausted by their defining characteristics. This is the realm of systemic value.

2) Concrete things, *i.e.* material, sensory, spatio-temporal objects, are better than formal systems since they consist of a greater number of properties. In practice, we normally use only a finite number of properties in evaluating them, but in theory any material object consists of a denumerable infinity of properties, *e.g.* points if nothing more. Things have a cardinality of $Aleph_0$. This is the realm of extrinsic value.

3) Concrete, individual human persons are better than things, since they consist of a greater number of properties than things. The number of properties constituting a concrete, individual human person is non-denumerably infinite, not merely denumerably infinite. Persons have a minimal cardinality of $Aleph_1$. They are non-denumerably infinite in value and in number of properties. This is the realm of intrinsic value.

Already, many highly controversial assumptions have been introduced.

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[1] Robert S. Hartman, *The Structure of Value* (Carbondale, Southern Illinois University Press, 1967), p. 114.

Is the concrete individual human person indeed non-denumerably complex? Is it necessary to introduce transfinite mathematics to support the value judgements, with which most of us would probably concur, that men are more important than things and formal schemes? Is it true that "better" depends upon *number* of properties possessed? In this essay I shall deal primarily with only the first of these questions, though I am prepared to argue against Hartman in some detail that men are more important than things or systems, even if men are finite; and that intrinsic value may depend upon the *kind* of properties possessed by a thing instead of upon the *number* of properties possessed.

Even if we grant that "better" depends upon number of properties possessed, and that men somehow possess a greater number of properties than material objects and such formal schemes as ideologies, philosophies, sciences and so on, we are still not committed to the conclusion that the concrete, individual human person possesses a non-denumerable infinity of properties or that he is non-denumerably infinite in value. However, Hartman has published his attempts to *prove* these conclusions; and as much as I would like to accept them, I find certain weaknesses in his proofs of the infinite value of man which must be exposed. In *The Structure of Value,* only one such proof, the "epistemological proof" is provided, but in an earlier article titled "Four Axiological Proofs of the Infinite Value of Man," this epistemological proof is supplemented by three additional proofs which are labeled "logical," "ontological," and "teleological." Each proof is based upon a different definition of "man." I find certain essential weaknesses in each of these proofs, weaknesses so serious that I believe that we actually have here *four proofs for the finite value of man* when all the dubious assumptions and conceptual confusions have been cleared away.

I shall not attempt to repeat these four proofs in complete detail, though I shall try briefly to summarize them. Curious readers should consult the Hartman article itself to check the accuracy of my summaries.

I. *The epistemological proof* is based upon the definition of man as a rational animal, an animal capable of thinking, capable of correlating thoughts with things. But how many thoughts can a man think? Hartman answers, in two steps, that he can think at least a denumerable infinity of thoughts, and that he can in the final analysis think even more thoughts than this – a nondenumerable infinity of them. If the number of things, situations, and sets of things and situations in the world is denumerably infinite, as is the case according to a theorem of transfinite mathematics, then man must be able to think a thought which corresponds to each one of them "in order to be a man." [2] The thoughts are in turn properties of the man who thinks them, and the man who can think such an infinity of thoughts thus possesses a denumerable infinity of properties and is at least denumerably infinite in value. But, as it turns out, man can not only think each item in this denum-

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    [2] Robert S. Hartman, "Four Axiological Proofs of the Infinite Value of Man," *Kant-Studien,* LV, 1964, p. 431. Repeated in *The Structure of Value,* p. 117.

erably infinite set, but he can even think that he thinks it ... and so on to infinity, but this time a non-denumerable infinity, a veritable infinity of infinities! The proof is even more complex and extended than that, but this is enough.

Now for the difficulties. First of all, no actual concrete individual human person *can* do all this, in any realistic sense of "can." I know myself well enough to know that I have not produced and never could produce a separate thought corresponding to each of an infinite number of items in the space-time world. If I must be able to think all these thoughts "in order to be a man," then perhaps I am not a man! Frankly, I doubt that any other concrete, existing human being can do it either, though any attempt to substantiate this doubt would raise many serious problems about the knowledge of other minds, which it might be best not to go into at the present moment. At least I am willing to conclude from *my limited* thought world that *I* have only a *finite number* of thought-properties, and thus am only of finite value. Let each man answer honestly for himself! As for the second stage of the argument, there is little point in talking about thinking to infinity about thinking an infinity of thoughts if one does not have this basic infinity of thoughts to start with. Upon honest introspection, I find that not only can I not think to infinity about thinking about *each* of the infinite constituents of the world, but I cannot think to infinity even about the single thought of thinking. I can think about thinking, and I can think about thinking about thinking. I can even carry out this process five or six times without losing track of what I am doing. But I cannot think about thinking about thinking ... an infinite number of times. Can you? Using *this* criterion, I thus find that my own value has a cardinality of about five or six, but surely not that of infinity. What do you find about yourself?

If I may be permitted to generalize, the basic difficulty with the epistemological proof is that no individual human person *can do* what Hartman suggests that we all can do in constructing a thought world. This obvious point is disguised in Hartman's writings beneath two fundamental ambiguities, the shift between the concepts of potential and actual infinity, and the absolutely devastating equivocation between the notion of the concrete individual human person and the ideal essence of the abstraction "man."

Does the proof purport to show that each man is merely *potentially* infinite in thought properties and thus in value, or does it show that each man is *actually* infinite in properties and value? The answer to this is not made clear; but if Hartman intends for his proofs to show the latter, his intentions are not fulfilled. At best, the epistemological proof shows only the potential infinity of the individual man, the limitlessness of what he might think potentially if he had the imagination, vocabulary, intellectual energy, and endless time to devote to the enterprise. All of these are very big "ifs." In fact, given the dearth of imagination, vocabulary, conceptual energy, and our finite three-score-and-ten years or so, none of this is even a *real potentiality* for any of us. It is at best a potentiality in the abstract. And if life-after-death, in which all these deficiencies are removed, is being

assumed here, it needs to be said explicitly *and defended*.

The crucial and devastating equivocation in the epistemological proof, however, lies in the unacknowledged shift between the concept of the concrete individual person on the one hand, and the ideal essence of man on the other. In associating the applied system with Kierkegaard, as in the remark that "Formal axiology confirms the radical value reversal of existentialism, in particular Kierkegaard: its highest value is the individual, its lowest the system, with classes – of individuals or things – in the middle," [3] Hartman focuses attention on the former. And the same occurs at the end of the epistemological proof, where he writes that "The result of the first axiological proof of the value of man is that each individual person is as infinite as the whole space-time universe itself." [4] However, no concrete individual person *can* do what Hartman says we can do, and he knows this perfectly well himself, though he is reluctant to admit it. Actually, he has admitted it in print in an earlier article, and his own words serve to refute him if he thinks that the epistemological proof shows the infinite value of the concrete individual person. After giving an earlier version of this epistemological proof, he remarked that "Obviously, no individual can actually think all these thoughts. The demonstration of man's infinity refers to ideal man." [5] It is thus "essential" or "ideal" man that is of infinite value, but since the concrete individual man always falls short of this ideal, we seem forced to conclude that the concrete individual man is only of finite value. No existing human being actually fulfills the concept "ideal man" as Hartman explicates this concept. Infinite value thus belongs only to the abstraction "man," but not to the individual person.

The application of the Hartman system to actual existing men not only shows that they are of finite value, but it also shows that they are of *unequal* value. The actual and potential thought worlds of existing men vary immensely in complexity. Men are limited by the languages they speak, and some men speak and thus think more complexily than others. Thus, the epistemological proof as applied to actual persons shows that men are of *unequal* value, though Hartman himself hopes that he has found a philosophical proof of the equality of all men based on the equivalence of infinities of a given order. Furthermore, we may be able to use the Hartman value system to show that men are of *less actual value* than computers. If the actual value of an entity depends upon the actual number of discrete thoughts which it can in fact think, then computers should be much more valuable than men, since they can far out-do us all in this respect, though they are still finite. Why would this not be a legitimate application of the Hartman value system? If we disagree with this outcome, could it be be-

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[3] Hartman, *The Structure of Value*, p. 254.

[4] Hartman, "Four Axiological Proofs of the Infinite Value of Man," p. 433. Repeated in *The Structure of Value*, p. 118.

[5] Robert S. Hartman, "The Logic of Value," *The Review of Metaphysics*, XIV, 1961, p. 410.

cause we think that value depends upon *kind* of properties possessed rather than upon *number* of properties possessed?

Although I regard Hartman's epistemological proof as useless in the attempt to prove the infinite value of the concrete human person, I do not regard it as useless for all axiological purposes whatsoever. On the contrary, if there is a being which can in actuality do what men can do only in ideality, and if it is legitimate to call this being "God," then we might easily construct an epistemological proof of the infinite value of God. It is the application of the proof to the individual man with which I wish to quarrel, but I readily admit that we might have here the inception of a proof of the infinite value of God. Many theologians would doubtless believe that attributing just this sort of infinite value to man is a sacrilege, for an *actual infinity* of thought properties belongs properly only to Omniscience.

II. The *logical, ontological,* and *teleological proofs* of the infinity value of man all make a common appeal to *the theory of types* to prove the non-denumerable infinity of man. The objections I develop to the logical proof may be extended to the other two proofs, though I shall not explicitly develop this extension in any detail. In the logical proof, it is asserted that man can reflect upon his reflections upon himself at least for a denumerable infinity of times. Of course, this premiss is *false from the outset* as applied to actual individual men, for no one actually can do it. (And if some men can, and others cannot, this only shows that men are of unequal value.) Assuming this false premiss, however, Hartman then argues that the *thinker* on this denumerable infinity of thinkings on thinking cannot be a member of this denumerable series, as forbidden by the theory of types. The self that does the thinking must be of a higher logical order than the series thought about, and since the series thought about has the cardinality of a denumerable infinity, the thinker must have the higher cardinality of a non-denumerable infinity. Just in case you think I am putting you on, let me quote from Hartman's argument:

> Thus although all the reflections upon myself, and the reflections upon these reflections, and the reflections upon the latter, etc., differentiate myself infinitely, they never cover the totality of myself, since there always remains the Self which must do the thinking. According to the fundamental axiom of the theory of types, whatever involves *all* of a collection must not be one of the collection; the thinker must not, logically, be part of the set of his possible thought objects, in particular, not of the set of his auto-reflections – the set of his reflection upon the reflection upon ... the reflection of himself. That which thus refers to all of a collection is of a higher logical order than the collection. If the collection itself is of order A_0, higher order is A_1.[6]

In his classroom presentations, I have heard Hartman argue along similar lines that the Self which thinks about all of space-time cannot be a spatio-temporal Self, this again being ruled out by an application of the theory of

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[6] Hartman, "Four Axiological Proofs of the infinite Value of Man," pp. 432-433.

types. The theory of types thus provides us with the rudiments of a proof of the eternity of the self, if I understand Hartman correctly. I am sure that Russell never anticipated that the theory of types would be put to quite this use!

Just how much metaphysical mileage can one get out of the theory of types? Hartman apparently believes that we can get a great deal. The theory of types was originally offered as a way of avoiding certain logical paradoxes or contradictions which arise when a property is predicated of itself, or when a sentence is permitted to refer to itself, *e.g.* the paradox of the Cretan who said that "All Cretans are liars." The theory of types thus forbids the type of self-reference which breeds such paradoxes. A property cannot be a member of the set of things to which it is predicated; a sentence cannot be a member of the class of things to which it refers, *etc.* Hartman makes a quasi-metaphysical application of the theory of types, arguing in the logical proof that the reflecter on infinite self-reflections cannot belong to this infinite set and must thus belong to a higher order of infinity. In the ontological proof he argues that the man who is free to order, praise, observe and appropriate for himself the infinite set of created objects must be of a higher logical order than the totality of creation. In the teleological proof, he argues that the self which constantly chooses from a denumerably infinite set of possibilities for self-realization must belong to yet a higher order of infinity. And in classroom presentations, he argues that the self who talks and thinks about the whole of space-time cannot be a spatio-temporal self. I submit that this is really getting a lot of metaphysical mileage out of the theory of types!

I am sure that those who are better versed in the theory of the theory of types could find suitable objections to the uses to which Hartman puts it, and I hope that someone will do so. Meanwhile, I would like to offer the following objections.

First, if I must belong to a second order of infinity in order to think about a first order of infinity, would it not follow that I must belong to a third order in order to think about a second order, and a fourth order in order to think about a third order, and so on? Where does the logic of the proof take us if we follow it out all the way? Similarly, if I must be non-spatial in order to think or talk about the whole of space, and non-temporal in order to think about the whole of time, would not the same pattern of reasoning prove that I must be non-real in order to think about the whole of reality, non existent to think about the whole of existence, beyond being to think about the whole of being? What is the difference between being non-real or beyond reality, existence and being and just plain unreal or non-existent? Does the proof show finally the non-existence of the Self?

Implicit in the above difficulty is a second one, namely that the line of argument which Hartman has initiated seems to generate an infinite regress of Selves or Thinkers. Can the Self or the Thinker have any knowledge of or thoughts about himself at all? If not, then it can never be known, as required by the theory of types, so why worry about it? If so, then an

infinite regress of Selves seem to be generated. If self of second order infinity is required before I can talk or think about a self of first order infinity, then this process can be repeated to infinity, and an infinite series of selves, meta-selves, and meta-meta-selves is generated. Somewhere along the way, we seem to have lost all contact with the concretely existing individual human person.

Thirdly, even if we admit that the self which reflects upon itself cannot be a member of its set of self-reflections, *i.e.* even if we agree that the theory of types will take us this far, we are still not driven to the conclusion that the self is infinite in thought properties, appropriations, choices, reflections, self-realizations or what have you. *For any actual concrete human being*, the given thought world always will be finite, the acts of appropriation will be finite, the range of choices will be finite, the real potentialities for self-realization will be finite – *however immense or indefinite*. And the self of logical order higher than such a finite set need belong only to a still higher *finite* order of logical entities in order to satisfy the requirements of the theory of types. Furthermore, there may still be a sense in which individual persons are "richer in properties" and thus "better" than things and systems, *even if men are finite*.

It is also possible to give a temporalistic account of self-knowledge which satisfies the requirements of the theory of types, without being driven to Hartman's infinity of selves and meta-selves. Charles Hartshorne and others influenced by Whitehead have given an alternative account of the nature of self and self-knowledge which rules out practical reference to the self of the immediate moment. Hartshorne contends, for example, that the self of the present moment, in the strictest intelligible sense of "present moment," can never literally know, talk about, or think about itself, since all introspective reflection is actually retrospective reflection on the immediately past states of the present self, and since the self which in time begins to think the thought "my present self" is already in the past by the time that this thought is completed. I am sure that there are other successful ways of avoiding self-reference without introducing an infinite Self, though Hartman seems unwilling seriously to entertain any alternatives.

Needless to say, most of the above objections to the Hartman value system would not arise if the system is applied in such a way as to show the finite and unequal value of concrete existing individual human beings, as was suggested earlier. I do not quarrel so much with the system as with the suggested applications of it with which Hartman has provided us. I wish that someone would develop an adequate proof of the infinite and equal value of each individual human being, but I am convinced that Hartman has failed in his attempts to do this.

University of Tennessee