

Leonard Wessell

**An Introduction to
Ontological Idealism**
(A World Hypothesis)

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Leonard Wessell

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To my dreams

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Forword

Preface: It may seem strange to have a preface begin an introduction. Alas, it must be so. The author of this text is an aged man, restricted to his apartment, bound to a wheelchair, unable to make use of the marvelous libraries of nearby German universities nor able to visit well stocked Seminar-Libraries of said universities. This means that the sources used and cited will be limited in number, namely to the ones to which I — the aged professor — have access in my own private library. Fortunately this “aged” author possesses a fine private library, limited of course, nevertheless containing many books that are essential to the ideas to be presented. The limited use of source materials will be sufficiently evident in the ensuing text. I do desire, however, that my reader know from where many of my ideas find their origin, accepted or not, hopefully stimulating the wish to read further material. Whatever, the limitation of available documentation is of secondary importance. Ideas and the expression of them, that motivates me first and foremost. It is my intention to present and argue for a specific philosophy, designated as “ontological idealism”. The ideas and argumentation constituting the body of this study, not any sourcing, they constitute the essential feature of the following. I want to think, to consider, to ponder and to assert truth about ontological idealism — the very connection between ontology and idealism being for some realist critics nothing more than a philosophical oxymoron, an *Unding* (to borrow a German expression). It will certainly be my task to reverse that opinion.

Short introduction: This book contains more than just a collection of organized ideas. In an important way, the study is very personal, indeed *the study is me* — my thinking about reality, about the sense and meaning of life, about this world, thoughts that I have so arduously accumulated over my reflective life. What an intellectual life, some 17 years (with interruptions) of studying at universities in America and Europe, doctoral titles from three different universities of three deferent countries and studies in other countries. Where ever I went, I found truly knowledgeable, often brilliant and always professional mentors — essential features of my educators that I have enjoyed during my studies. Alas, in some cursed way, much of my intellectual experience has been

outbalanced and distorted by more than a some 15 years of serious physical ill-health, even a psyche painfully distorted, often threatened by endangerment of clear-headedness. During all the time, reflecting and reflecting, I was driven by the same recurring number of questions, focused on two cognitive domains: WHY? and HOW SO? The “why” and the “how”, however, are not those of a desired theodicy might require, even a personal one, rather one embracing the very structure of reality. *So is the world of reality, alive with the marvels of creation, yet faced with, even intertwined with the destructive destruction of things, with death, suffering, and often a grim finality. (Just ask the dinosaurs.)* The glory of existence in its fulness *per se* seems to be bought at the cost of the misery of the individual. The creative and destructive glory of the world seems to take no cognizance of anything specific, including me, turns on me, sends its inexorable grim reaper just for me (for you too, dear reader), yet it does perhaps offer some redeeming secrets in its depths, such as love, mercy, reconciliation — or so I pray. All those years and even now, I have been driven by the *desire* to come “home”, to be “at home” in reality, yes, my “*désir d’être*” (thinking of Sartre) or, better, the very *conatus* that I am (thinking of Spinoza)¹, to find a dwelling of eternity as my home, yet frustrated that life is in the end naught but a sojourn. All those years of sojourning about, I do think, manifest themselves in my desire to understand, to comprehend, to fathom the straits of reality. I fear that the tumultuous formulation just given above could mislead my reader. My feelings, my striving to break loose, my search for “home”, are but a psychological ambient in which my emotionality moves about. They form an motivational background to the thoughts to be expressed, to the thinking to be done, but are no more than that, i.e., the immediate stimulant of my thoughts. The place of origins is my intellect. My intellectual interest lies in what reason can reveal! I long most passionately to make rational sense out of my world — and that desire is the one that inspires my rational reflections — ones that have led me on to ontological idealism.

I have entitled my book as an “introduction”, i.e., I wish to lead my reader in a thoughtful manner into a philosophical theorizing with the hope of enthralling his/her intellect such that the desire arises to reflectively enter deeper into the ideas, grapple with their argumentative cogency and, in the last analysis, to find them sufficiently challenging, such that he or she must pause, reflect and judge their value, their validity (or not), i.e., their revelation of the structure of what is. I suppose I have inadvertently borrowed Aristotle’s thesis concerning

the origins of philosophical thinking, namely the wonder and marvel that the world showers me with. Such an origin should not be mistakenly grasped, however, because it is not the marvel one feels in entering some sort of entertaining land of wonders — that is fun, thrilling — and then all is gone, its time having quickly passed, the playful fades away as the weightiness of the “real” world reasserts itself. The longing for profundity replaces frolicking, thinking replaces wondering, writing replaces doing; so originates this book

Any attempt to present a philosophy faces an insuperable problem. If the philosopher wants to present systematically his ideas, comprehensively examined, he /she is likely to produce several, maybe even a half-dozen volumes as Prof. Lorenz Puntel has done. That task literally entails few thousand pages. Then there is Hermann Schmitz, who, for his part, has published his 10 volume *System der Philosophie*, easily encompassing five thousand pages. I do not intend nor, indeed, am I capable of such a definitive presentation of idealism. Such an attempt I will leave to the aspiring Hegel-types. This means, the more I cease being *all*-encompassing in my thinking, the more selective I must be relative to what I intend to discuss. In short, my announced goal is to introduce my reader to “my” ontological idealism, focusing upon just one clue, so to speak, a common place matter. Looking curiously and reflectively about me, I have the clear awareness that something “is”, and that “is” must be investigated for its generalized structure because therein lies the structure of reality. Wait, I have been too hasty, as are most philosophers. I have overlooked something — something of supreme importance. Things that are *there*, are there “for me”. Ah, my clue in its fullness consists in the fact that my experience is confronted by an “is” and a “for me”. I have no thinking, even no consciousness without these two factors. I simply cannot separate the two, whereas realists would argue that the “for me” is not part of the clue. Shh, look away, they say. There is no need to integrate together “consciousness”, viz., the “for me”. No, it suffices that the “is” alone will do. “Being” should yield the form and content of my philosophy, consciousness being derivative. In contrast, we idealists do find the two hallmarks to be inseparable, granting thereby an equal ontological value to consciousness as to what “is” of whatever presents itself to self to consciousness. This unification as a theoretical clue typifies my idealism. Indeed, it is not a great stretch to note that the whole of my developing thought proceeds from this one clue.

I will present my idealism in three chapters. Chapter 1 deals with the universality of consciousness and Being — a universality without end, i.e., infinite. Chapter 2 deals with that which is without end, namely infinity. Consciousness is infinite — a concept sorely needing consideration. Chapter 3 discusses the universal "I" (=the absolute, God) that is consciousness. The three chapters together have as their task to project a plausible world view from an ontological idealist's standpoint. Chapter 4 was an earlier and a bit confusing attempt with many references to German terms. All that could well hinder an understanding of said chapter. Dissatisfied with my efforts, I reworked and rewrote my ideas ending with three chapters mentioned, to which I have appended my first wandering attempt as a chapter, namely Chapter 4. It makes a significant supplement to Chapter 1. I do advise reading it, though it is not necessary for my argument. Although the three chapters are organized by the intention of presenting ontological idealism in general, each chapter evinces, nevertheless, a certain wholeness that would be typical of an article, and can be so understood in separation from the whole.

Finally, although I cannot present a definitively intricate and a tightly coupled argument, there are differing profundities involved. At times, I must caution my reader, my old nemesis, namely health, could force its way into my creative mind and slow me down rendering my thinking here and there more superficial than planned. Should the tiredness of the days threaten the fulness of my argument, I will let my reader know.

All has been said! The gauntlet has been duly cast. I invite my reader to join me in my entry into ontological idealism. To where that will lead is not in my full control. As the highly reflective Nicolai Hartmann (1882-1950) noted over one hundred years ago

The thought does not develop as we want, rather the way it must. It steadily holds to that which inspires it and relative to that the wants of man have no power².

Footnotes

- 1 For the existential meaning of Sartre's "désir d'être" see Angèle Kremer Marietti, *Jean-Paul Sartre et le désir d'être. Une lecture de l'Être et le néant*, (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2005). Concerning the fascinating meaning of *conatus* for Spinoza see the various articles in *La ética de Spinoza. Fundamentos y significado*, editor Atilano Domínguez, (Castilla de la Mancha: Ediciones de la Universidad, 1992) — some 45 articles were written. I am no adherent, neither to Sartre nor to Spinoza, yet the fascination, if not passion for the inner impelling force expressed in the thinking the two philosophers strike me as compelling, certainly forming the motivational background to any worldview I might possess and attempt. Offhand I suggest the articles by Troisfontaines, Seidel, Carval and Fernández. Biographic information is given the Bibliography for this book.
- 2 Cf. the essay "Der philosophische Gedanke und seine Geschichte" in Hartmann, *Der philosophische Gedanke und seine Geschichte. Aufsätze*, (Berlin: Reclam, 1957, originally 1955, 1957), 22.