

One thing this book attempts to show is that Kant's antinomies open a way towards an overcoming of that nihilism that is a corollary of the understanding of reality that presides over our science and technology. But when Harries is speaking of the antinomy of Being he is not so much thinking of Kant, as of Heidegger. Not that Heidegger speaks of an antinomy of Being. But his thinking of Being leads him and will lead those who follow him on his path of thinking into this antinomy. At bottom, however, the author is neither concerned with Heidegger's nor Kant's thought. He shows that our thinking inevitably leads us into some version of this antinomy whenever it attempts to grasp reality in toto, without loss. All such attempts will fall short of their goal. And that they do so, Harries claims, is not something to be grudgingly accepted, but embraced as a necessary condition of living a meaningful life. That is why the antinomy of Being matters and should concern us all.

THE ANTI-NOMY OF BEING

DE GRUYTER

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Foreword

It is an honor and a privilege to write these prefatory words to Karsten Harries's *The Antinomy of Being*. Harries is an expert in the philosophy of art and aesthetics, on the philosophy of architecture, on the work of Martin Heidegger, and also on the emergence of modernity (following on from the great historians of ideas, Ernst Cassirer, Alexandre Koyré and Hans Blumenberg). Harries has been extremely influential in American philosophy but is perhaps not as well known internationally as he should be, although many of his books have been translated into languages such as Japanese, Chinese, Korean and German. The welcome publication of his latest book, *The Antinomy of Being*, based on his graduate seminars, gives the reader a very vibrant sense of what it is like to participate in one of Harries' renowned seminars given at Yale, giving a direct experience of his unique style of questioning and interrogating a classical text for its still living significance and relevance.

Karsten Harries was Howard H. Newman Professor of Philosophy at Yale University until his retirement in 2017. He was born in Jena, Germany, in 1937, and, as a seven-year-old boy in Berlin, witnessed at first hand the catastrophic end of the Second World War. His father—a physicist—emigrated with the family to the USA, where Karsten studied at Yale University with such leading figures as Charles Hendel and Wilfrid Sellars, receiving his B.A. in 1958. He remained on at Yale University as a graduate student, receiving his Ph.D in 1962, with a dissertation entitled *In a Strange Land: An Exploration of Nihilism*, directed by George A. Schrader, a leading Kant scholar and one of the founders of the Society for Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy (SPEP).¹ Upon completion of his doctorate, Harries was appointed Assistant Professor of Philosophy at the University of Texas at Austin (1963–1965), but he returned to Yale in 1966 as Associate Professor and remained there for the rest of his teaching career. Harries was promoted to full Professor of Philosophy at Yale in 1970. He then held the Brooks and Suzanne Ragen Professor of Philosophy and, most recently, until retirement, the Howard H. Newman Professor of Philosophy. Karsten Harries has held many visiting professorships, including the University of Bonn (1965–1966; 1968–1969) and a Guggenheim fellowship (1971–1972). His publications include *The Meaning of Modern Art* (1967); *The Bavarian Rococo Church: Between Faith and Aestheti-*

¹ This dissertation (Yale 1962) was microfilmed by University Microfilms, Ann Arbor, Michigan in 1967 (no. 67-9640) and can be found online at https://cpb-us-w2.wpmucdn.com/campus.press.yale.edu/dist/8/1250/files/2011/10/in-a-strange-land_an-exploration-of-nihilism-1zusd5v.pdf.

cism (1983); *The Broken Frame* (1989); *The Ethical Function of Architecture* (1996); *Infinity and Perspective* (2001); *Art Matters. A Critical Commentary on Heidegger's "Origin of the Work of Art"* (2009), and *Wahrheit: Die Architektur der Welt* (2012). With Christoph Jamme, he edited *Martin Heidegger: Kunst, Politik, Technik* (1992), published in English as *Martin Heidegger: Politics, Art, and Technology* (1994).

A native German speaker, Prof. Harries is particularly known as an original interpreter of the work of Martin Heidegger, especially his later writings on art, poetry, language, and technology. Indeed, Harries was one of the select few invited by the publisher Vittorio Klostermann to contribute to Heidegger's 80th birthday *Festschrift*.² Professor Harries was also one of the first philosophers in the USA to challenge Martin Heidegger's intellectual relationship with National Socialism, something that became a matter of controversy in the 1970s.³ He translated and commented critically on Heidegger's notorious Rectoral Address (*Rektoratsrede*) of 1933, where Heidegger aligned Freiburg university with the National Socialist cause.⁴ Harries was also one of the first to compare critically Heidegger's and Wittgenstein's conceptions of language as providing the canopy of our world,⁵ something later taken up by Richard Rorty. In opposition to Wittgenstein, Harries shows that Heidegger is a proponent of the inadequacy of everyday language and of the necessity for poetry to keep up a space for meaning. But Harries has always been inspired by Wittgenstein's concern that philosophy assist us in finding our rightful place in the world.

Harries' first monograph, *The Meaning of Modern Art* (Northwestern, 1968)⁶ grappled with the question of nihilism. Nihilism is the view that the entire world has no sense, our existence has no point. It is essentially futile. Harries points out that nihilism is first named as such by Jacobi, and, for him, it arose from a certain direction in Kant and was marked by an "intoxication with self" as the poet Jean Paul Richter put it. Interestingly, Harries sees nihilism as emerging from a relentless rationalism – from the philosophy of Spinoza, for instance. A philosophy that attempts to bring everything under reason ends up in absurdity.

² Karsten Harries, "Das befreite Nichts," in *Durchblicke: Martin Heidegger zum 80. Geburtstag*, ed. Vittorio Klostermann (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1970), pp. 39–62.

³ Karsten Harries, "Heidegger as a Political Thinker," *The Review of Metaphysics*, vol. 29, no. 4 (1976), pp. 644–669.

⁴ Karsten Harries, Translation with Notes and Introduction of Martin Heidegger, *The Self-Assertion of the German University and The Rectorate 1933/34: Facts and Thoughts*, *The Review of Metaphysics*, (March 1985), pp. 467–502.

⁵ Karsten Harries, "Wittgenstein and Heidegger: The Relationship of the Philosopher to Language," *The Journal of Value Inquiry*, vol. 2, no. 4 (1968), pp. 281–291.

⁶ Karsten Harries, *The Meaning of Modern Art: A Philosophical Interpretation* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968).

Harries returned to the theme of nihilism in his essay, *Between Nihilism and Faith: A Commentary on Kierkegaard's Either/Or* (2010).⁷ Since his very first book, *The Meaning of Modern Art*, Harries has been particularly interested in Heidegger's reflections on the meaning and status of art in modern times and especially in the current age dominated by technology. His central question is: does art still speak to us today? Or, has art, as Hegel put it, lost its highest function? Are we truly in an age of nihilism? Is it a medium for truth or merely for pleasure or distraction? If art still functions meaningfully for us as more than mere distraction or ornamentation—how does it do so?

Since the 1980s, Harries has been one of the leading figures in the emerging discipline of the philosophy of architecture. Harries has always been deeply interested in the relation between the sacred and profane, between the religious and the secular world view, the tension between mortals and gods, to invoke the terms of Heidegger's "fourfold". For thousands of years since the Greeks, Western culture has lived in a sacred space but now, as Hölderlin put it, the gods have fled. Nietzsche exclaimed that no new god had appeared in the last two thousand years. Our culture – especially with the dominance of scientific knowledge and technology – seems resolutely secular. Does this secular culture still leave room for a relationship with the transcendent – with what Kant called "the starry heavens above me"? Harries addresses these issues in his collection of essays, *The Broken Frame*.⁸ Heidegger's reflections on the Greek temple in his magisterial essays "The Origin of the Work of Art", and "Building, Dwelling, Thinking", on the nature of "dwelling" (*Wohnen*) have inspired Harries' own excursus into the philosophy of architecture. His second book, *The Bavarian Rococo Church*, published in 1983 (and, more recently, in 2009 published in German as *Die Bayerische Rokokokirche. Das Irrationale und das Sakrale*),⁹ quickly led to Harries being recognized as a leading expert on German regional Church architecture, specifically in the age of Rococo. Here his question was – what separates the age of Baroque and Rococo, an age of faith from the age of Enlightenment, with its obsessive commitment to rationalism? He is now recognized as one of the world's foremost theorists of contemporary architectural theory, especially since the publication of his ground-breaking third monograph, *The Ethical Func-*

⁷ Karsten Harries, *Between Nihilism and Faith: A Commentary on Either/Or* (Berlin and New York: DeGruyter, 2010).

⁸ Karsten Harries, *The Broken Frame. Three Lectures* (Washington: Catholic University Press, 1989).

⁹ Karsten Harries, *The Bavarian Rococo Church: Between Faith and Aestheticism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983). The reworked and expanded German edition is Karsten Harries, *Die Bayerische Rokokokirche. Das Irrationale und das Sakrale* (Dorfen: Hawel, 2009).

tion of *Architecture*, in 1997.¹⁰ For Harries, the central and profound question is: what separates architecture from mere building? For Harries, as for Heidegger, architecture is opposed to ornamental representation. Professor Harries has close intellectual collaborations with internationally renowned architects including Kevin Roche. In 2007, the School of Architecture of Yale University recognized Harries' work in this area by awarding him the degree of Master of Environmental Design. He has a dedicated *Festschrift* in his honor, *Himmel und Erde: Festschrift für Karsten Harries*, "Heaven and Earth: Festschrift to Honor Karsten Harries," a special issue of *International Journal of Architectural Theory* in 2007.¹¹ In 2013 he was awarded an honorary Doctorate of Literature by University College Dublin.

Harries' fourth monograph, *Infinity and Perspective*,¹² is a sustained reflection on the limits of human existence in the modern world through an exploration of the tension between finitude and infinity, immanence and transcendence. It is inspired by the early modern philosopher and theologian Nicholas of Cusa's meditations on the unspeakable transcendence of the infinite deity which is nevertheless reflected and refracted in the various perspectives one can take on the deity, just as there are infinite radii in a circle. For Harries, one could just as well mark the emergence of modernity with the work of Nicholas of Cusa (or Renaissance scholar of art and perspective, Alberti) instead of the more customary figure of René Descartes.¹³

Karsten Harries lectured for many decades at Yale University – 54 years in total. He has the distinction of directing the most doctoral students in Philosophy in the USA – a grand total of 63 dissertations (the present author's included!). On April 28th and Saturday, April 29th, 2017, the Philosophy Department of Yale University held a two-day seminar, *Truth and Beauty: A Conference in Honor of Karsten Harries*, attended by his colleagues and by many of his former students. Besides being a renowned philosopher and expert in architectural

¹⁰ Karsten Harries, *The Ethical Function of Architecture* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1997). The Chinese translation appeared in 2001 (Beijing: Hua Xia Publishing House, 2001).

¹¹ See Special issue, "Heaven and Earth: Festschrift to Honor Karsten Harries," *International Journal of Architectural Theory* 12 no. 1 (August 2007).

¹² Karsten Harries, *Infinity and Perspective* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2001). Susan E. Schreiner, *Are You Alone Wise? The Search for Certainty in the Modern Era* (Oxford: OUP, 2011) is appreciative of Harries' analysis of the discovery of perspective in early modernity for its impact on the theological understanding of infinity and the finitude of the human place in the world.

¹³ Karsten Harries, "Problems of the Infinite: Cusanus and Descartes," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* (Winter 1989), pp. 89–110.

theory, he is an accomplished artist working with pastels and oil paintings and recently had an exhibition of his work at the Yale Whitney Humanities Center. For Karsten, art is the concrete complement to the abstractness of philosophy.

Karsten Harries' lectures and seminars have enthralled and challenged generations of students at Yale. His lectures and seminars have been appreciated by his students as models of the rigorous interrogation of classical texts for their enduring relevance. Harries regards philosophy as an essentially ethical reflection – it demands that all forms of knowledge, including contemporary scientific knowledge, give an account of their own meaningfulness. What is the human place in this amazing non-human world? Kant and Heidegger asked this profound question in their own unique ways.

The current book is one such lecture course. In *The Antinomy of Being* Harries meditates on the central problematic of Kant but through the lens of Martin Heidegger. The central dilemma or antinomy of the human condition is that humans have a sense of a transcendence that they can never articulate coherently; they are somehow in touch with reality as it is in itself, while at the same time they dwell in a world of appearances. The objective world is what is experienced by us, but we are condemned to experience it in our conditioned human way. Yet, as soon as we come to the realization that what we experience is precisely the world as constituted by our embodied and embedded human existence, then somehow we have already transcended this limitation and grasp the way things really are. To see a perspective and to be able to identify it *as a perspective* is already to occupy an a-perspectival stance or a transcendent position above that perspective itself.¹⁴ Or, as Kant and Hegel knew, to identify a limit is already to have transgressed that limit. Our experience of living a life, then, already puts us in touch with a transcendence that is at the very ground of our being. This is the nub of Karsten Harries' argument. The very recognition of the antinomy of being, of the ambiguity of our human knowledge that straddles finitude and transcendence, puts in question the very idea of an entirely objective body of scientific knowledge. Harries claims we can experience a genuine 'window' which invites us to leave our own limited view behind when we truly encounter another person as a person, as a unique source of value.

Kant, of course, is responsible for the theme of antinomy. But Harries claims that the notion of antinomy – this time under the name "the ontological difference" also permeates the work of Martin Heidegger. The very title of Heidegger's

¹⁴ See Karsten Harries, "On the Power and Poverty of Perspective: Cusanus and Alberti," *Cusanus: The Legacy of Learned Ignorance*, ed. Peter Casarella (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2006), pp. 105–126.

main work, *Being and Time*, calls attention to the fact that being has always been in an inextricable relation with time and temporality. Despite the efforts of Plato and others to posit the idea of an eternal, timeless realm of true being, human existence is intrinsically temporal, historical, conditioned, limited, finite, fragmentary and fragile. From the outset of his philosophical reflections, Harries has grappled with the idea that humans seek to impose meaning on their existential situation and to exert control over their lives, and at the same time live in conditions they do not control and can never surmount. Heidegger himself is struggling with this issue in relation to the disclosure of Being. On the one hand, Being is disclosed and in and through human Dasein, as Heidegger affirms; and, even in the *Letter of Humanism*, Heidegger states that Being is only as long as Dasein is. On the other hand, Being's truth and meaning cannot be solely dependent on human Dasein; and Being, as the condition of all beings, is other than those beings. In short, Being transcends beings; it is the 'there' (*Da*) of beings; but, as such, it also transcends language, even though, as Heidegger maintains, language expresses the intelligibility both of the world and of *Dasein's* being-in-the-world. Beings, moreover, are independent of *Dasein*. There were beings in the world before *Dasein* existed.

Harries sees Heidegger as recognizing the same challenge as Wittgenstein – how do we escape the language which forms our world? How do we avoid being imprisoned in language? Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus* recognized the limits of both logic and language. For Wittgenstein, the sense of the world has to lie outside the world, in transcendence. Language, for Heidegger, is the house of Being, but it can also be the prison-house of human being. Harries explores this architectural metaphor – language as home, as house, but also language as the conceptual frame, even a prison.

Harries' meditation on the antinomy of being and of language is rich and many-sided and also fascinating and compelling. Harries forces us to rethink our intuitions about contemporary scientific culture, with its commitment to rationalism and explanatory closure. He is showing that the drive for metaphysics and for scientific objectivity, for a complete theory of everything always exposes the antinomy that there is another side to this rationality, an unarticulable transcendent ground. Philosophers since Kant have grappled with these antinomies. But the tension has a deeper source in modernity. On the one hand, Harries is inspired by the Christian Neoplatonic mystical tradition of Eckhart and Cusanus to enter into and engage more deeply with this dialectic – between what can be said and what resists all saying. He is deeply aware that Heidegger too was inspired by Eckhart, and even, at one stage, planned to write a book on him. On the other hand, Harries recognizes that a very special shift took place in modernity – a conceptual shift that was noticed by everyone from Nietzsche and Husserl

to Ernst Cassirer,¹⁵ Alexandre Koyré,¹⁶ and Hans Blumenberg.¹⁷ Somehow, the project to liberate human beings from the grip of a limiting anthropocentric worldview led to the opposite extreme, dislocating human beings entirely from their home in the world. Is the price of technological culture that human beings will be permanently adrift and alienated from their home?

In the *Antinomy of Being* Harries offers us a rich meditation on the question of the home and homelessness of human being in its embodied and embedded historically conditioned existence. Harries is aware that the Kantian bifurcation of appearance and reality led to a 'thing-in-itself' which is both necessary and impossible to grasp. This tension is equally present in Husserlian phenomenology's attempt to ground all "sense and being" (*Sinn und Sein*). In fact, all science, as Schopenhauer and Nietzsche both knew, is an attempt to inscribe reality within some kind of closed and complete order of concepts, principles and rules.

Harries' book is a work of original philosophizing. It is a work of deep and serious questioning yet it is written in a conversational style without heavy technical jargon. Harries' range of reference is also extraordinarily wide – from Plato to Aquinas to Nietzsche, and ranging across poets from Hölderlin to Hugo von Hofmannsthal and Trakl, to the mystics, such as Meister Eckhart and Nicholas of Cusa. Harries is forcing the reader to think about the nature of modernity. Where do we stand today? He is following on from the great thinkers – including Nietzsche and Heidegger – who have questioned our modern culture seeking its significance and its truth. Harries is struck deeply by the deep human desire for truth – especially as it manifests itself in the desire for control and mastery over the universe and everything. As Harries writes: "The philosopher, possessed by the pathos of truth, does indeed look a lot like Goethe's Mephistopheles." This book has a very deep meditation on the nature of truth, working primarily with Heidegger's notion of truth as disclosure against the more traditional known of truth as adequacy to reality. Harries discusses not just Heidegger and his critic Ernst Tugendhat, but also Nietzsche's challenging assertion that

¹⁵ Ernst Cassirer, *Individuum und Kosmos in der Philosophie der Renaissance* (1927), trans. *The Individual and the Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1963).

¹⁶ Alexandre Koyré, *From the Closed World to the Infinite Universe* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Press, 1957).

¹⁷ Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, trans. Robert M. Wallace (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985); and his *The Genesis of the Copernican World*, trans. Robert M. Wallace (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987). See Karsten Harries, "Copernican Reflections," review of Hans Blumenberg, *Die Genesis der kopernikanischen Welt, Inquiry*, vol. 23, 1980, pp. 253–269. See also Elizabeth Brient, *The Immanence of the Infinite: Hans Blumenberg and the Threshold to Modernity* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2002).

truth is really a series of metaphors and illusions that have been forgotten as such, coins that have been effaced. For Nietzsche, humans have an irrepressible drive to generate metaphors but they end up living within them as prisons impeding their ability to see beyond the scope of these dead metaphors. Humans live in a “columbarium of concepts” (*Kolumbarium der Begriffe*). To break out of the prisonhouse of language and of concepts, one has to go beyond everyday language. One has to experience transcendence in art and most especially in the human person. The person is always more than the subject who is contrasted with the objective order. Harries’ discussion on the transcendent nature of persons and his return to the personalistic language (found in Kant, Scheler and Stein) is an interesting contrast to the post-personalist language of Heidegger in his discussion of Dasein. But it is in the notion of the person that Harries’ work comes together.¹⁸ Harries boldly challenges the modern technological outlook. He writes: “science cannot know anything of persons as persons.” The person (and the loss of the person) is the focal point for his engagement with art, architecture, poetry, modernity, and indeed part of his struggle with Kant. Kant demands we treat persons as ends in themselves but does not give a theoretical account of how we recognize persons as persons. Persons function in a different space from that of the material universe. As Harries puts it, with reference to Wittgenstein, “The subject, the person, has always already fallen out of this picture.” Harries turns to Kierkegaard for the recognition of the person in his or her pure subjectivity. Persons occupy first-personal stances or perspectives on the world. These perspectives are ineliminable even as one tries for an a-perspectival ‘objective’ view of things. In a way, Harries’ claim is that art and architecture as well as philosophy have to make space for persons. This is surely a thought worth pursuing.

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¹⁸ See, for instance, Karsten Harries, “The Ethical Significance of Environmental Beauty,” *Architecture, Ethics, and the Personhood of Place*, ed. Gregory Caicco (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 2007), pp. 134–150.

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