

Preface to *Struktur und Sein*

This book is the realization of a project that I undertook in the first years of my teaching and research activity at the University of Munich more than two decades ago. In my lectures and seminars on systematic philosophy, I wrote, with the supportive collaboration of my then-student Geo Siegwart, a manuscript titled “*Systematic Philosophy—Outline of a Program*” [*Eine Programmschrift*] intended to serve as a text for the participants in my courses. Before long, hundreds of copies of this text circulated among students and colleagues. Thereafter, a noted German press offered to publish the text as a book. The offer was attractive, but I turned it down. I was convinced that serious philosophical labor has its price, and that this was particularly the case for a book with the comprehensive scope and the ambitious intent of this particular work; such a book could be a significant contribution, I concluded at the time, only if it was the result of a long process of ripening.

From my current perspective, I deem my earlier conviction to have been correct. My conception of that time, which had developed chiefly under the influence of the pre-Kantian metaphysical tradition and the classical German tradition in philosophy, has changed significantly in the ensuing years. There remain some basic issues, theses, and intuitions characteristic of those traditions, but all have been subjected to radical transformations, particularly with respect to methodology and in light of developments in the philosophy of science. The transformations arose from my intensive engagement with contemporary formal logic, philosophy of science, and analytic philosophy. The kind of systematic philosophy that I now advocate and attempt to develop can be viewed as a form of analytic philosophy, but it differs from analytic philosophy in its traditional and in most of its contemporary forms in two respects. First, it resolutely takes up central elements of the tradition of *philosophia perennis*. Second, it opposes the fragmentary character of the understanding and of the treatment of philosophical issues characteristic of the majority of analytic philosophers in that it strives to reconfer upon philosophy its traditional systematic status.

Although this book is the expression of my own philosophical path and of the conception to which that path led me, it could not have taken its current form without the stimulation that I received over the course of many years from many of my colleagues, my assistants, my doctoral students, the participants in my regularly occurring

graduate courses at the University of Munich, and not least from many with whom I engaged in lively intellectual exchanges during my in some cases lengthy stays at various foreign universities, particularly in the United States. To this large group of people I owe my primary thanks.

I must refrain from personally thanking all of these individuals by name. I must, however, make exceptions for two American colleagues.

Nicholas Rescher (University of Pittsburgh) gave me the decisive impulse to overcome the megalomaniacal idea, championed by the German Idealists, of developing an absolute system of philosophy, but without leading me to embrace the equally senseless alternative of philosophical fragmentation. From Rescher's books—especially *The Coherence Theory of Truth*, which appeared in 1973—I learned how one can do systematic philosophy in a sober, clear, and rigorous manner. Rescher's path later led to his monumental three-volume work, *A System of Pragmatic Idealism* (1992–94). Although my own philosophical path diverges from his in significant ways, I am grateful for the fundamental inspirations I have gained from the conversations we have had in our many encounters.

Alan White (Williams College, Williamstown, MA) merits wholly unique acknowledgment and recognition. After he had read some of my work, he contacted me via the Internet in September 2003, posing several interesting philosophical questions. From that arose a lively discussion that led to a remarkable collaboration: despite the distance between Germany and the United States, current electronic means of communication made possible nearly daily contact. Soon, White offered to translate into English the parts of this book that were already in first-draft form (something more than half of what became the entire book), and indeed promptly set himself to the task. He then translated the other parts as soon as they were available in first drafts. In this manner, an English version of this text emerged almost simultaneously with the German version. White's enthusiasm for the philosophical conception presented in the book, his encouragement, and his suggestions contributed decisively to my decision to commit all of my time and energy to the completion of the book. During a visit of several weeks' duration that I made to beautiful Williamstown in fall 2004, I was able not only to enjoy the hospitality of White and of his wife, Jane Nicholls, but also, by working on the book together with him, to bring the project a good step further. This constructive collaboration continued during White's stay in Germany in June 2005. The significance of his contributions, particularly with respect to the development of the English edition, cannot be overestimated.

I owe deep thanks to a number of philosophical friends who have accompanied the development of my philosophical conception with great interest and intensive discussions. In particular, I thank Constanze Peres, Christina Schneider, and Karl-Heinz Uthemann for their in various ways critical but always constructive readings of the final draft of the manuscript of this book; they contributed much with respect to clarifying it linguistically as well as contentually. I would also like to thank Sylvia Noss for her scrupulous corrections to the manuscript and the galley proofs.

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Lorenz B. Puntel
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