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Nicolai Hartmann's Determinational Pluralism in the Context of Compatibilist and Libertarian Assumptions

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The article presents Nicolai Hartmann's philosophy of freedom in the context of selected assumptions regarding the dispute between compatibilism and incompatibilism. In Part I, I discuss the fundamental difficulties of the problem of free will using the contemporary division of positions. In Part II, I present the libertarian perspective on the problem of free will. Part III concerns Hartmann's layered ontology and presents the assumptions underlying his concept of freedom, as well as his criticism of incompatibilist assumptions. Part IV contains a characterisation of the antinomy of free will in Hartmann's thoughts. Part V is an analysis of the eponymous concept of determinative pluralism (we can only speak of free will when at least two types of determination overlap), the validity of which has been confirmed by an analysis of selected texts by Hartmann and his past and present studies. In Part VI, I consider whether it is reasonable to classify Hartmann as a compatibilist, given that his concept of free will goes beyond both compatibilist and incompatibilist positions.

Keywords: free will, Nicolai Hartmann, determinational pluralism, compatibilism, metaphysical libertarianism

1. The Standard Argument (Against Free Will)

In the debate on the justification of free will, which has been going on for hundreds of years, a significant number of philosophical and non-philosophical positions have emerged. It is impossible to list all the classical and modern philosophical positions that are worth considering in this dispute; therefore, it is common to narrow down the positions (and the dispute itself) in order to try to organise the complex issue of free will. The task of contemporary philosophical advocates of freedom is not only to find their own arguments for justifying free will, or even more broadly, freedom. Equally frequent is the need to take a position at the debate table, which also requires certain terminological adjustments, also reducing a given philosophy to the framework of a given position (compatibilist or incompatibilist).

Before I describe Hartmann's concept of free will and Robert Kane's metaphor of the "incompatibilist mountain,"¹ it is proper to explain the position it corresponds to, which would be the "standard argument" against free will made by William James in his *Dilemma of Determinism*² (1896). The standard argument includes two main assumptions about free will. First one declares the so-called "determinism objection": if ontological determinism is true, so if every process and action is determined and connected by a causal chain due to its ontological structure and relations, neither the process nor the action is free (in an ontological sense).³ This part of the standard argument is directed at determinists and compatibilists who agree with the thesis of a universal and absolute determinism, which, in most cases, amounts to causal determinism. Every compatibilist (aka soft-determinist) declares that free will can be maintained while assuming that some kind of determinism (in most cases: causal determinism) is true. The standard argument goes against the main assumption of the compatibilists.

¹ Robert Kane, *A Contemporary Introduction to Free Will* (New York–Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 33–34.

² William James, "The Dilemma of Determinism," in *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy* (New York–London–Bombay: Longmans, Green and Co, 1897).

³ Bob Doyle, *Free Will: The Scandal in Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: I-Phi Press, 2011), 27–28.

That ontological opposition corresponds to the main assumption of the opposite position, called incompatibilism: free will cannot be maintained if a determinist thesis (in most cases: causal determinism) is true. An incompatibilist position does not require agreeing that free will is true (which is called hard incompatibilism). However, if we decide to argue against the absoluteness of determinism to justify the free will thesis, we can call ourselves (metaphysical) libertarians.⁴

The second part of the standard arguments is directed against ontological libertarians (who agree that maintaining free will is possible) and also incompatibilists (who may or may not make positive assumptions about free will). Libertarians (such as Kane) take a stance against determinism. They add an ontological category of “chance”⁵ to the decision-making process. Chance in libertarian assumptions has crucial meaning in one’s autonomy because it breaks causal chains of determination, thereby allowing the subject’s autonomy. Chance overcomes the limits of a deterministic ontology. It also overcomes the necessity made by strict, absolute determinism and, in libertarian theory, creates possibilities for a subject to act as an author of their own decisions. It fairly exceeds the perspective of a determined subject who is limited only to the necessary actions, obligating him due to causal chains. The second part of the standard argument is directed against the libertarian ontological “optimism,” and especially against the chance category and the assumption about agency (as an authorship) of the subject in the decision-making process.⁶ This argument can also be made by a compatibilist to libertarians. It states that if indeterminism is true (so, if chance is real and the objective, absolute necessity of determinism is false), our actions are still not free, because if chance exists, it also breaks crucial causal chains of events, such as those that are necessary to maintain the agency (as an authorship) of the subject’s actions.⁷ As a whole, the argument about libertarianism is called a “randomness

⁴ This position is divergent from political libertarianism, so I will use this term only in an ontological context. See: Kane, *A Contemporary Introduction to Free Will*, 32–33; Ken M. Levy, “On Three Arguments against Metaphysical Libertarianism,” *The Review of Metaphysics* 76, no. 4 (2023): 725–732, <https://doi.org/10.1353/rvm.2023.a899479>.

⁵ Doyle, *Free Will*, 4–6, 29.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 23–25.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 55.

objection” (against free will).⁸ In other words, at least limited causality is necessary to maintain the thesis that our actions are in fact “ours,” not that they are only a favourable combination of events, in line with our expectations and efforts. Some causality is needed to say that the action was made “by” the subject, not just that it was planned by them.

If libertarians’ “chance” were compliant with the limited causal determination (not determinism), it could maintain both negative and positive freedom, because incompatibilists reject only the absoluteness of causal determinism, not the idea of causal chains of events altogether, which is crucial for the decision-making process. They reject the complete necessity of actions, not the agency. Compatibilists and hard determinists oppose this position due to ontological bonds and dependencies between determination and determinism. How can we argue that the subject self-determined some action if we already assumed that determinism (in most cases: causal determinism) is false? They marginalise the negative freedom problem to focus on the positive freedom case and the subject’s agency, putting it against libertarian assumptions. If the subject made a decision, it is not only a manifestation of their freedom against the external determination (negative freedom, e.g., alternative possibilities), but it is also a manifestation of their will through their agency, which can be self-determination.

The randomness objection is an extension (generalisation) of the objection to ontological indeterminacy in the causal chain. A determinist can say: if a subject cannot maintain control of their agency over their voluntary actions, they deal only with the randomness of external, predetermined possibilities of events in which they only play a role and can be an illusive author of their actions, but in reality, they are determined by the random facilities. External factors, of course, determine them all the time.

The Standard Argument against free will, declared by James and his successors, narrows down the problem of free will to four possible positions that oppose one another. Radical determinists and indeterminists argue against the possibility of free will, while the two remaining positions (compatibilists and libertarians) argue for the existence of free will, not against it. Nevertheless, both of those remaining positions fail in their arguments against the opposite, ontological concept of free will. As John Martin Fischer writes:

⁸ Ibid., 27–29.

Either causal determinism is true, or it is not. If it is true, then we would lack freedom (in the alternative-possibilities and source senses). If it is false, then we would lack freedom in that we would not select the path into the future—we would not be the source of our behavior. Indeterminism appears to entail that it is not the agent who is the locus of control.⁹

As I point out in the following parts of this article, Hartmann's concept goes beyond the limitations pointed out by James, proposing a position of deterministic pluralism, which not only does not limit itself to choosing one of the two positions that are opposed in their ontological assumptions but also tries to combine them, recognising the mutual benefits of compatibilist and libertarian positions.

2. The Incompatibilist Mountain Problem

Kane gave an answer from the ontological libertarianism position to the standard argument thesis.¹⁰ He pointed out two crucial problems with the libertarian concept of free will. To describe those problems, he used a metaphor of conquering a mountain. According to Kane, traversing a mountain can be seen as a two-stage process—the first stage represents climbing to the top, and the second stage represents coming back down the mountain. Both stages need to be completed in order to say that the mountain has been conquered. In Kane's metaphor, the eponymous mountain symbolises the free will problem and the traveller is symbolised by every incompatibilist and their ontological assumptions. The two-stage process of conquering a mountain represents two main problems that any ontological libertarian free will concept needs to answer in order to maintain its ontological assumptions. As he writes in *A Contemporary Introduction to Free Will*:

[...] if free will is not compatible with determinism, it does not seem to be compatible with indeterminism either. Let us call this the "Libertarian Dilemma." Events that are undetermined, such as quantum jumps in atoms, happen merely by chance. So if free actions must be undetermined, as libertarians claim, it seems that

⁹ John Martin Fischer, *Free Will: Critical Concepts in Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 2005), XXIX quoted in Doyle, *Free Will*, 43.

¹⁰ Doyle, *Free Will*, 27.

they too would happen by chance. But how can chance events be free and responsible actions? To solve the Libertarian Dilemma, libertarians must not only show that free will is incompatible with *determinism*, they must also show how free will can be *compatible* with *indeterminism*.

Imagine that the task for libertarians in solving this dilemma is to ascend to the top of a mountain and get down the other side. (Call the mountain "Incompatibilist Mountain" [...]). Getting to the top consists in showing that free will is incompatible with determinism. (Call it the Ascent Problem.) Getting down the other side (call it the Descent Problem) involves showing how one can make sense of a free will that requires *indeterminism*.¹¹

The first task of this "libertarian dilemma" requires a justification for the ontological thesis that free will and determinism are mutually exclusive (the ascent problem).¹² In an attempt to solve this problem, Kane incorporates into his libertarian metaphysics terminology associated with quantum processes that occur in the human brain and designs two thought experiments. The first experiment is called the "quantum randomiser"¹³ and demonstrates that indeterminism plays a role in how information is processed in the brain. An acting subject has no ability to interfere with the structure of information processing (and especially decision-making) at the brain level. Quantum noise, however, negates the thesis of exclusively deterministic brain functioning. Libertarian free will must also include the thesis that free will is at least possible.

The second task of the "libertarian's dilemma" (the descent problem)¹⁴ comes after the ascent problem, and is, as Kane puts it, even more difficult. Libertarian freedom based on will must coexist with the possibility of volitional action. The next thought experiment, called the "probability bubble,"¹⁵ shows how quantum indeterminism is connected with the subject's motives, values, moral dilemmas, and most importantly, an effort of their will to achieve their goal through a decision. It is the final result of the subject's effort of will that makes

¹¹ Kane, *A Contemporary Introduction to Free Will*, 33–34.

¹² *Ibid.*, 34; Doyle, *Free Will*, 44.

¹³ Robert Kane, *Free Will and Values* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985), 167.

¹⁴ Kane, *A Contemporary Introduction to Free Will*, 34; Doyle, *Free Will*, 44.

¹⁵ Kane, *Free Will and Values*, 144–146.

their action self-determined and not merely conditioned by external determinism. Until the individual's will resolves its struggles with alternative possibilities, the outcome of deliberation remains unpredictable.

Kane's models support an indeterministic view of the world, based on scientifically justified indeterminacy at the subatomic level. However, indeterminacy at the decision-making level also influences the process of generating indeterminate information at a level inaccessible to individual control. The subject does not have full control over the order in which information is generated in their mind. However, the subject can refer to the information received in the process of rational deliberation, intentionally conditioning their decision, for example, on their values. This allows for arguments for the existence of alternative possibilities, the choice of which the individual can influence through the effort of will. The problematic part of both models is that they assume that the self-determination of the subject can overcome the randomness of indeterminism. Kane (as with most libertarians) argues that this indeterministic free will does not force the result of a decision to be random or externally determined. Partial unpredictability at the first part of the decision-making process (generating alternative possibilities of action) is a crucial part of free will agency and moral responsibility in the metaphysical libertarianism position.

Kane recognises, however, that a concept of free will that transcends the ontological perspective (by including moral values) must accept and justify the agent's self-determination despite the indeterministic basis of actions. This is a condition for the subject's agency and a solution to the descent problem of the "incompatibilist mountain."

3. The Ontological Basis of Freedom in Hartmann's Stratified Ontology

Hartmann's ontology illustrates a stratified structure of reality.¹⁶ Ontological categories manifest themselves within this structure:

The categories are as follows: unity and multiplicity, concord and discord, contrast and dimension, discretion and continuity, substratum and relation, element and

¹⁶ Nicolai Hartmann, *New Ways of Ontology*, trans. Reinhard C. Kuhn (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1953), 43–54; Włodzimierz Galewicz, *N. Hartmann* (Warszawa: Wiedza

structure. Here belong also: form and material, inner and outer, determination and dependence. Also, qualitative contraries can be added, such as identity and difference, generality and individuality; likewise, the modal categories: possibility, actuality, necessity, and their negative counterparts.¹⁷

Categories exist within the strata of the real world;¹⁸ whether they exist on multiple levels depends on their ability to be modified. Special attention, however, should be paid to the fundamental categories that appear in all strata of Hartmann's ontology. For this paper, the most important category will be the fundamental category of determination, which manifests itself in every stratum in a different form.¹⁹

Every level of reality (starting from the bottom: material, vital, psychical, and spiritual) is interconnected to its nearest level/s (in relation to higher/lower stratum or both).²⁰ Aside from the categories, Hartmann's stratified ontology also includes categorical laws of the real world. These laws create and justify the relationships between different modifications of the same category in different strata.²¹ In fact, the space in which negative (but only partially) and positive freedom exist in Hartmann's ontology is justified by various types of determinations (most importantly, relationships between themselves) in different strata (especially material and spiritual) and structural laws of the real world (especially the law of freedom or the law of the *novum*).²² Every stratum of reality is partly independent of the lower one, but the relationships and dependences between them

Powszechna, 1987), 76–80; Zbigniew Zwoliński, *Byt i wartość u Nicolaia Hartmanna* (Warszawa: PWN, 1974), 25–31.

¹⁷ Hartmann, *New Ways of Ontology*, 43.

¹⁸ Galewicz, *N. Hartmann*, 80–82.

¹⁹ Hartmann, *New Ways of Ontology*, 69–72.

²⁰ Predrag Cicovacki, “New Ways of Ontology—The Ways of Interaction,” *Axiomathes* 12, no. 3 (2001): 163, <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1015852024525>.

²¹ Ingvar Johansson, “Hartmann's Nonreductive Materialism, Superimposition, and Supervenience,” *Axiomathes* 12, no. 3 (2001): 195–201, <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1015824714956>; Alberto Peruzzi, “Hartmann's Stratified Reality,” *Axiomathes* 12, no. 3 (2001): 239–240, <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1015889032702>; Galewicz, *N. Hartmann*, 82–103; Zwoliński, *Byt i wartość u Nicolaia Hartmanna*, 35–48.

²² Hartmann, *New Ways of Ontology*, 73–83; Keith R. Peterson, “An Introduction to Nicolai Hartmann's Critical Ontology,” *Axiomathes* 22, no. 3 (2012): 309–310, <https://doi.org/>

lay the foundations for Hartmann's concept of freedom, which goes beyond the standard positions on the subject.

It is worth pointing out the dependencies that condition Hartmann's ontological freedom. The crucial categorial laws needed to explain Hartmann's concept of moral freedom are the laws of dependence: "Categorial dependence is dependence only of the higher categories upon the lower, not conversely. Hence, the lower categories, measured by their determinative power, are the stronger ones. Strength and height in the order of strata stand in an inverse relationship."²³ Based on the law of indifference, the teleological activity of a person does not constitute the ontological foundation of causality (Hartmann finds purposefulness in the practical realisation of moral values by the subject). The indicated relationship is a reverse of that: causality constitutes the basis of the subject's teleological action and is existentially independent (indifferent) from it, based on the law of indifference. The law of recurrence states that categories of a lower stratum return to a higher stratum, provided its material basis is capable of modifying the categories to a higher stratum of real being (which is justified by the law of modification)²⁴. The ontological "novelty" (novum) in the higher form of category (elemental or fundamental) is not determined by its lower form. Its lower form is only a foundation for its material basis (by the law of the novum): "The novelty of the higher categorial stratum is completely free in relation to the lower stratum. Despite all its dependence, it asserts its autonomy. The superior structure of the higher stratum has no scope 'inside' the lower stratum, but 'above' it."²⁵

The categories of higher strata are materially founded on the categories of lower and stronger strata (the law of matter: the lower categories determine the higher categories at most as their material base).²⁶ Their ontological freedom,

10.1007/s10516-012-9184-1; Roberto Poli, "The Basic Problem of the Theory of Levels of Reality," *Axiomathes* 12, no. 3 (2001): 274–276, <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1015845217681>.

²³ Hartmann, *New Ways of Ontology*, 87.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 76.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 87–88.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 87; Nicolai Hartmann, *Systematyczna autoprezentacja*, in Nicolai Hartmann, *Myśl filozoficzna i jej historia. Systematyczna autoprezentacja*, trans. Jan Garewicz (Toruń: Comer, 1994), 108; Leszek Kopciuch, "The Ontological and Axiological Foundations of the Meaning of Human Life in Nicolai Hartmann's Philosophy," *Studia z Historii Filozofii* 15, no. 3 (2024): 82, <https://doi.org/10.12775/szhf.2024.014>.

however, manifests itself not only in negative freedom and their escape from constraints but also in the possibilities of categorical novelty that is not founded on the lower strata²⁷ and that, even if only partially, modifies the form of new categories.

The most important dependence for the description of Hartmann's ontological freedom is the law of freedom:

The law of freedom states that in the stratified order throughout, the higher ontological stratum, regardless of its dependence on the lower, maintains its independence in relation to it. The reason lies in *the relationship of the categories*. Since the higher categories are determined by the lower ones, at the most in respect to their matter (and throughout in respect at least to their basis for being), they must be free in relation to the lower categories by virtue of their autonomous structure. This their freedom, then, exists in spite of, and alongside of, dependence and does not contradict their being weaker. It has the character of genuine autonomy and, regarding its content, coincides with the categorical novelty of the higher stratum. Its scope is clearly limited by the law of matter. It is a scope granted to the weaker in relation to the stronger and therefore lies not within, but above, the domain of the former.

Freedom in dependence—this is no contradiction. All authentic freedom is freedom “from” something and in opposition to something. And this something must have the character of a fetter “against” which it asserts itself. Otherwise freedom would be sheer absence of bounds and resistance, something purely negative. The actual meaning of freedom, however, consists in superiority over something else. And this superiority is the essence of categorical freedom. It becomes manifest in a very definite ontological priority, the priority of height.²⁸

The above extensive fragment of *New Ways of Ontology* clearly indicates that Hartmann's ontological freedom exceeds libertarian assumptions about free will.²⁹ For him, freedom is not an escape from dependencies or their negation (it is worth noting that the laws of categorical dependencies appear in the plural—deterministic monism would be opposing the possibility of freedom):

²⁷ “[...] Freedom of the will, ontologically considered, is only a special case of the general autonomy of higher forms in relation to the lower ones. [...] In both cases autonomy asserts itself as over against dependence on what is below, although of course such dependence is not to be denied either,” Hartmann, *New Ways of Ontology*, 124.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 94.

²⁹ “The shortcoming of the old theories was that they did not attack the problem of the freedom of the will within this total context, but in isolation,” *ibid.*, 124.

The problem can be finally dealt with only on the basis of ontology. For the question at issue concerns the relationship of the will to the determining powers which dominate the world from the bottom up. So what is needed here above everything else is a comprehensive view (*Zusammenschau*) of the determining factors at the different ontological levels and, in addition, an analysis of dependence and independence characterizing their mutual relationship.³⁰

Free will is rather a beneficial fruit of the occurrence and overlap of those dependencies with the ontological openness of the category of determination (in the form of causality) ensured by the categorical novelty and the law of freedom.³¹

The higher modifications of determination contain not only its matter, which is causality, but also its categorical novum. Ontological deterministic dependence is a condition for positive freedom in the act of choosing the realisation of values by the subject. The highest modification of the determination (occurring on the spiritual level of reality) includes a new type of influence, which is teleological activity. Teleological activity constitutes a superstructure over causality and is materially dependent on it, while at the same time, it is free from it due to the law of categorical novelty and the law of freedom. An individual acting teleologically submits to pre-imposed reasons for their own actions—for example, acting based on moral values: “For Hartmann, value determinism is indirect; to be realised in the real world, values necessitate human acceptance.”³²

Libertarians' assumptions, in the first place, focus on justifying negative freedom, while compatibilists' assumptions focus on justifying positive freedom,

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Categorical rights constitute a broader set of relationships between layers and categories. Given the limitations of the article, the relationships necessary for further consideration of freedom in the context of compatibilism and incompatibilism are indicated.

³² Leszek Kopciuch, “Nicolai Hartmann's Conception of Free Will in the Context of the Debate Between Compatibilism and Incompatibilism,” *Forum Philosophicum* 30, no. 1 (2025): 169, <https://doi.org/10.35765/forphil.2025.3001.08>; see also: Allan W. Larsen, “The Problem of Freedom in the Philosophy of Nicolai Hartmann,” in *Nicolai Hartmann 1882–1982*, ed. by Alois J. Buch (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag Herbert Grundmann, 1982), 188–189 quoted in Alessandro Gamba, “Libertà e personalità nell'antiteleologismo metafisico di Nicolai Hartmann/Freedom and Personality in Nicolai Hartmann's Metaphysical Antiteleologism,” *Rivista Di Filosofia Neo-Scolastica*, no. 4 (1998): 63.

treating autonomy as the most important manifestation of freedom, proclaiming, like Hartmann, that “[...] causal determinism is relatively harmless.”³³ As he writes:

[...] it was Kant who first advanced on a new road in trying to understand freedom without indeterminism [...]. This freedom differs from indetermination. It is not “freedom in the negative sense” but “freedom in the positive sense”. Its possibility within a causally determined world is safeguarded for Kant by the opening up, behind this world, of another world—an “intelligible” world, the world of things-in-themselves.³⁴

In Hartmann's concept, as Kopciuch notes, “an autonomous will is the core of the self-determination of the subject.”³⁵ Neither Kant nor Hartmann rejects causal determinism in order to justify one's autonomy:

What this means is that if Kant's concept of freedom can be treated as an example of determinism, then Hartmann's theory can as well, especially given the following explicitly held opinions of Hartmann regarding Kant's conception of freedom: (i) that Kant was right in saying that human freedom does not require indeterminism; (ii) that he was right in saying that human freedom is only of a positive nature, not a negative one; (iii) that he was right in saying that human freedom consists in self-determination only.³⁶

Kant treated the problem of freedom firstly within the context of theoretical philosophy and solved the causal antinomy by basing the idea of free will on his concept of practical reason:³⁷ “Hence room is left for the positive freedom of will without an interruption of causal chains, provided man as a moral being has an intellectual nucleus which co-operates in the decisions of the will [...]. So, the effects of that higher determination in the sensory world, instead of deriving from the latter's causal nexus, are free from its sway.”³⁸ Although Kant's conception

³³ Hartmann, *New Ways of Ontology*, 130.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 127.

³⁵ Kopciuch, “Nicolai Hartmann's Conception of Free Will,” 171.

³⁶ Nicolai Hartmann, *Ethics*, trans. Stanton Coit, vol. 3: *Moral Freedom* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1932), 53–61.

³⁷ Hartmann, *New Ways of Ontology*, 124.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 127–128.

created new antinomies in the relationship between freedom and categorical imperative, Hartmann resolved most of them, which was impossible following only Kant's categorical imperative,³⁹ but became possible due to the existence of multiple moral values (which nevertheless created new antinomies as well).

Hartmann considered teleological determinism as a closed type of determinism. By rejecting causalism and accepting universal purposefulness, we also find no ontological space for free will, this time determined teleologically, in the real world. Purposefulness does not solve the problem of freedom, even if it appears to be closer to the subject than external natural determination. This constitutes Hartmann's particular objection to indeterminists:

[...] if the world, from the bottom to the top, were determined teleologically, the highest form of determination would be common to all being. No higher form could rise above it, and the human will would have no determinative superiority over subhuman processes. That is to say, it would exhibit no element of superadded autonomy as over against the processes of nature; instead it would be on the same footing with these natural processes. Consequently the autonomy of a higher mode of determination would be impossible for him.⁴⁰

Free will should not be in opposition to the causal chains, nor to the purposeful action of the subject. Hartmann considers the denial of determinism as an example of the helplessness of metaphysics in the face of the problem of necessity, which couldn't solve the problem:

[...] the knot had thereby been cut rather than unraveled. Neither could the theory of gaps in the chain of dependence be reconciled with the general nature of the determinative relationships, nor was the free play that was gained sufficient for the meaning of ethical freedom. For obviously *free will is by no means indeterminate*

³⁹ Nicolai Hartmann, *Ethics*, trans. Stanton Coit, vol. 1: *Moral Phenomena* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1932), 158–160; Nicolai Hartmann, *O podstawach ontologii* in Nicolai Hartmann, *O podstawach ontologii. Cele i drogi analizy kategorialnej*, trans. Jan Garewicz (Toruń: Comer, 1994), 25–27; Kopciuch, "Nicolai Hartmann's Conception of Free Will," 178; Zwoliński, *Byt i wartość u Nicolaia Hartmanna*, 310.

⁴⁰ Hartmann, *New Ways of Ontology*, 129–130.

will but, rather, a very determined one, although determined by itself. Self-determination, however, could not be ensured through a mere negation such as a partially suspended determination.⁴¹

Hartmann denies incompatibilists' assumptions by not denying deterministic ontology and trying to make free will compatible with the ontological dependence of categorial laws. He also accepts the libertarian argument that free will must be guaranteed as the authorship (perpetration) for the subject, not only as rational control, like Hobbes's or Spinoza's compatibilism. He exceeds both positions, considering their assumptions and arguments for his categorial and moral freedom. Teleological determinism is a finalistic type of dependence negating freedom, but only if it's considered in isolation. Teleological determination, understood as the choosing of values, can maintain a subject's free will: "Values determine the will, not with necessity, but only as a demand. The will need not follow this determination, nor can the will remove it. Complementary to this there is another form of determination, the self-determination of the will, on the strength of which it decides for or against the demand."⁴²

Moral values influence the subject in their practical decisions. Negative freedom from values creates its own antinomies. Hartmann's direct critique against both (isolated) deterministic and indeterministic assumptions can be found in *The New Ways of Ontology*:

Thus three metaphysical theories stand opposed to each other: two types of determinism and, as a third, indeterminism opposing both the others. And right down to our own time all opinions on the question of freedom can be grouped accordingly. But from an ontological point of view it is easy to see through the errors on all three sides. Causal determinism runs counter to the law of novelty in not allowing to the higher strata their own forms of determination. Teleological determinism runs counter to the law of recurrence in transferring to the lower strata a category of the highest ontic stratum (that of purposiveness). Indeterminism finally runs counter to the basic categorial law in denying the superior strength of the lower categories.⁴³

⁴¹ Ibid., 126.

⁴² Ibid., 71–72.

⁴³ Ibid., 126–127.

Hartmann also critiques the incompatibilist principle of alternate possibilities (critiqued by compatibilists such as Harry Gordon Frankfurt⁴⁴) by accenting the positive, not negative, meaning of free will in argumentation on the subject's authorship:

We are accustomed to regard this self-determination as freedom of the will and thereby denote the condition under which alone accountability and responsibility exist in human beings. But in life we usually associate with it the idea of an uncertainty. Freedom seems to involve an undecided alternative. But that is by no means enough for the ethical problem of will and action. The free will is not the undetermined will but rather the “determining” one.⁴⁵

Not open alternatives (as incompatibilists argue), but a higher form of determination is crucial for justifying free will: a self-determination and its compatibility with the lower types of determinations: “And the great problem of the freedom of the will [...] does not consist in the question of whether the will has a field of indeterminacy for it to play in but rather in the totally different question of how self-determination in it can coexist with the lower types of determination.”⁴⁶

The Antinomies of Hartmann's Concept of Free Will

The problem of antinomies in Hartmann's free will concept⁴⁷ is described by him comprehensively in the third volume of his *Ethics* entitled: *Moral Freedom*.⁴⁸ The problem begins in two antinomies found in his analysis of Kant's theory of

⁴⁴ Harry G. Frankfurt, “Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility,” *Journal of Philosophy* 66, no. 23 (1969): 829–839, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2023833>.

⁴⁵ Hartmann, *New Ways of Ontology*, 72.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Undoubtedly, the aporetic of freedom in relation to values requires a wider, strictly axiological consideration. In this paper, I mostly focus on the ontological dependences, fundamental to Hartmann's free will. My wider considerations on this topic can be found here: Krzysztof Rojek, *Wolność w kontekście determinizmu: analiza porównawcza teorii N. Hartmanna i R.H. Kane'a* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej, 2019), 79–101.

⁴⁸ It is worth noting that the original German *Ethik* was published, containing three parts in one book, but the English translation was published as three separate volumes. Nicolai Hartmann, *Ethik*, 3rd ed. (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1962), 621–821; Hartmann, *Ethics*, vol. 3: *Moral Freedom*.

freedom: the antinomy of causality, which is solved by Kant's categorial imperative, and the antinomy of the Ought. Three additional antinomies emerged from the antinomy of Ought when Hartmann tried to exceed the Kantian free will concept with his material ethics. Collectively, he referred to them as an antinomy of autonomy and divided them into three phases, as three subordinate antinomies: between positive and negative freedom, between being determined by values and not being determined by values, and between general and individual freedom.⁴⁹

An Ought antinomy, seen in Kant's concept of freedom, comes from the consideration that the subject is free in the positive sense when accepting the Ought of the categorial imperative and in the negative sense when rejecting it. But when free in the negative sense, the subject chooses indirectly to be determined by nature. As mentioned earlier, antinomy can be solved by Hartmann's material ethics, containing many moral values, instead of one universal moral principle. Negative freedom from values allows the subject to make an alternate, practical decision. The difficulty of resolving the second antinomy is expressed in the contradiction between the solutions of the causal antinomy (which was solved by Kant) and the antinomy of Ought.

To solve the free will problem, Hartmann produces an additional type of determination added to an already determined and stratified world. The new type of determination is self-determination, and it is based on awareness and choice of moral values in an emotional-cognitive staged act. As Kopciuch states: "Human will is thus determined by values, but the latter cannot determine the will directly: it is always the free person who must decide which values are to be realized. The person must respond to their appeal or demand and must really do so within his or her own value cognition and self-determination."⁵⁰

Hartmann treats the positive and negative freedom antinomy as a false one. Causal determination is direct and unconditional, while axiological determination is indirect and conditional. Self-determination comes from negative freedom to teleological determination and allows the subject a practical act.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Hartmann, *Ethics*, vol. 3: *Moral Freedom*, 126–133; Kopciuch, "Nicolai Hartmann's Conception of Free Will," 179; Zwoliński, *Byt i wartość u Nicolaia Hartmanna*, 315.

⁵⁰ Kopciuch, "Nicolai Hartmann's Conception of Free Will," 179.

⁵¹ Hartmann, *Ethics*, vol. 3: *Moral Freedom*, 223–230.

The antinomy between being determined by values and not being determined by values can be solved by realising the staged structure of a moral person's autonomy.⁵² Before a moral decision, people are not bound by teleological determination, which determines them after their decision to realise a chosen value. Determination of values does not collide with the self-determination process, so the second of Hartmann's antinomy is also false.⁵³

The last of the three subordinate antinomies is only partly solved. The difficulties come from a relationship between a person's individual will and the influence of general values. For the subject, the values are external. Their will is indifferent to the value itself; even if the subject realises it, they are still an individual person. However, the following issues remain unsolved: i) how exactly does an individual decision-making process among the spectrum of values proceed, ii) what criteria guides the subject in choosing one value and not the other, iii) how does the subject determine the very moment of making a moral decision, and iv) to what extent would the results of observing these processes have an objective value, describable in phenomenological language? One of the reasons for the insolubility of the antinomy of autonomy is the metaphysical nature of the problem of freedom and the limitations of descriptive, philosophical language.⁵⁴ Regardless of this outcome, Hartmann's free will concept remains inspiring for contemporary philosophers of free will.

5. Determinational Pluralism

A new type of determination (personal autonomy) needs to come directly from the person as a practical decision. Nevertheless, it must also be compatible with both causal and teleological determinations. The term "determinational plu-

⁵² Kopciuch, "Nicolai Hartmann's Conception of Free Will," 180–181.

⁵³ Hartmann, *Ethics*, vol. 3 *Moral Freedom*, 128–129.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 246–247; Leszek Kopciuch, *Wolność a wartości: Max Scheler, Nicolai Hartmann, Dietrich von Hildebrand, Hans Reiner* (Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej, 2010), 204–221.

ralism” used in this paper was proposed by Andrzej Noras.⁵⁵ It is the concept according to which freedom can only exist when at least two types of determination overlap,⁵⁶ being causality and purposefulness. The fundamental category of determination (not determinism) has its categorical forms in each layer of real existence, signifying varying degrees and kinds of determination.⁵⁷ These determinations (appropriately categorised) can enable the subject to act freely despite the freedom-excluding causal monism and purposive monism, observable within the individual layers of real being, whose exclusivity Hartmann rejects: “[...] Causal monism [...] respects the law of power but violates the law of freedom; contrarily, teleological monism, in accordance with the laws of dependence, requires causal determination. Therefore, Hartmann rejects all monistic approaches in favor of determinational pluralism [...]”⁵⁸

Both determinations differ, among others, in categorical dependencies (defined mainly by the laws of height, power, novelty, and freedom), degree of complexity, universal and individual degree of validity, the type of obligatory of the determination (the possibility of negative freedom), the creative role of the subject, temporal context (of purposeful action), and others. Although higher categories are always materially weaker than lower ones (causality can exist without teleological determinacy), purposefulness contains a categorical novelty in the form of autonomic, purposeful actions, the author of which is the subject who freely chooses to realise a specific value. Freedom of purposeful determination without its categorical novelty would remain merely a wish if the basis of autonomy were to be monistic determinism alone. A break from the chain of conditioning is achieved not by denying (causal) determinism⁵⁹ but by embracing it and transcending it towards the realisation of values. A moral subject can be free because they are bound by both external and internal dependencies. Furthermore, they experience numerous values, both rationally and emotionally, and the determinative effort comes from the subject's decision based on their individual

⁵⁵ Andrzej Jan Noras, *Nicolaia Hartmanna koncepcja wolności woli* (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 1998), 84.

⁵⁶ Hartmann, *Ethics*, vol. 3: *Moral Freedom*, 86–98.

⁵⁷ Zwoliński, *Byt i wartość u Nicolaia Hartmanna*, 315–320.

⁵⁸ Noras, *Nicolaia Hartmanna koncepcja wolności woli*, 84.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 56.

will and cognition of values. As Kopciuch states: “values determine human consciousness irrespective of the human will.”⁶⁰ Autonomy is expressed in the practical act of decision and rests within the subject.

6. Hartmann as a Compatibilist?

By accepting causality, Hartmann's theory may be considered as compatibilist, but his categorial novelty and argumentation towards autonomy may deny such a premature conclusion. Hartmann's ontology exceeds classical *liberum arbitrium indifferentiae*. Compatibilists deny classical free will and propose their own terminology, which is mostly based on rational control over decisions in positive freedom with (theoretically) a lack of any negative form of freedom from determinism. Hartmann agrees with the harmlessness of causality due to its open-ended nature in an advanced ontological model of reality, which is also consistent with the compatibilists' assumptions.

From a libertarian point of view, compatibilists make some semantic excuses on the fundamental level of the problem of freedom, limiting “free will” to mere control over actions based on a subjects' knowledge about necessities (Spinoza) or by opposing necessity with coercion, leaving an ontological gap for freedom, but not for free will in its classical sense (according to Hobbes, necessity is harmless to freedom, only coercion negates freedom). James called such semantic excuses the “quagmire of evasion”, and Kant called them “wretched subterfuge.”⁶¹

I think that Hartmann, in his concept of free will, is much closer to accepting the core assumptions of compatibilism than libertarianism (which he openly criticised), but that does not make him a compatibilist. His concept of free will exceeds both positions, and he denies the standard dichotomy (determinism—in-determinism) in a long, maybe even purposeless, free will debate.

⁶⁰ Kopciuch, “Nicolai Hartmann's Conception of Free Will,” 174.

⁶¹ Robert Kane, “Responsibility and Free Will in Dworkin's Justice for Hedgehogs,” *Boston University Law Review* 90, no. 2 (2010): 614; see also: James, *The Dilemma of Determinism*, 149; Immanuel Kant, *Critical Examination of Practical Reason*, in *Kant's Critique of Practical Reason and Other Works on the Theory of Ethics*, trans. Thomas K. Abbott (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1889), 189.

The Compatibilists assumption falls apart for two main reasons: i) for its presumption of a subject's control, at the same time ignoring the main, monistic determinism time, and ii) for its assumption of general determinism itself, which nowadays is harder to maintain because of the indeterminism on the quantum mechanics level, which is still a challenge for contemporary ontology and the philosophy of science. Hartmann's determinational pluralism solves both of these ontological difficulties by: i) overcoming monistic determinism and ii) justifying autonomy as positive freedom manifesting itself in not only the ontological but also the axiological realm.

The standard dichotomy opposes free will only with monistic determinism (mostly seen as causalism, but in Leibniz's metaphysics, universal determinism takes the form of teleologism).⁶² In any case, the convergence of Hartmann's philosophy of freedom with the assumptions of compatibilism is much clearer than with the assumptions of incompatibilists. The most important argument here is the significance of the multi-layered category of determination for the process of realising individual freedom in the world of ideal (timeless, general, and objective) moral values.⁶³ As Kopciuch summarises:

Consequently, in general terms Hartmann's philosophy of free will is intermeshed with various forms of determinism. These are (i) a "vertical" categorial determinism (between categories and *concretum*), (ii) a modal determinism, (iii) a "horizontal" determinism (between different facts or events), and (iv) an axiological determinism (in human activity and cognition). In this context, it is no wonder that Hartmann writes that "Free will is not undetermined will, but is precisely a will that is determined and chooses determinately" [...].⁶⁴

⁶² Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Theodicy. Essays on the Goodness of God the Freedom of Man and the Origin of Evil*, trans. Ethel Mary Huggard (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul LTD, 1951), 143–144; Przemysław Gut, "Zagadnienie wolności osoby ludzkiej w ujęciu Leibniza," *Analiza i Egzystencja* 2, no. 1 (2005): 58–59; Kopciuch, "Nicolai Hartmann's Conception of Free Will," 177; Clive Borst, "Leibniz and the Compatibilist Account of Free Will," *Studia Leibnitiana* 24, no. 1 (1992): 49–58.

⁶³ Galewicz, *N. Hartmann*, 150.

⁶⁴ Kopciuch, "Nicolai Hartmann's Conception of Free Will," 175.

7. Conclusions

As I have shown, in Hartmann's free will concept, causality is a universal form of determination. Yet it is still open for directional determination, allowing the subject to make free choices. Purposefulness, which is based on experiencing values, is the final determination and, more importantly, it is closed, accessible only to a person.

In my opinion, contemporary philosophers, who support the standard free will dichotomy, ignore the open character of some types of determination, neglecting them and rejecting them as just specific cases of general determinism. They are limiting themselves only to aiming at determinism as the main danger to the existence of the freedom of will. It is a popular, intuitive position, but neither deep nor complex enough.

Indeterminist assumptions cannot guarantee negative freedom or, at the very least, more autonomy, and that is why Hartmann critically refers to indeterminism as a gate to randomness: "not only is indeterminism false ontologically; it is also shown to be a false ethical requirement. There is no need of it at all."⁶⁵

On the other hand, the compatibilist position also falls apart with the assumption of monistic determinism. Only a pluralistic model of determination and stratified reality can support the subject's autonomy. It is necessary to note that determinational pluralism could not fully solve Hartmann's antinomies of free will. Even so, I think that Hartmann's thought can still be interpreted as being partly compatible with the ideas of compatibilism and libertarianism. Nevertheless, he overcomes both positions in the same way, so that the two types of determinations overlap each other.

Hartmann neither simplifies nor radicalises the problem of free will, such as the dispute between incompatibilists and compatibilists. His stratal ontology successfully exceeds both positions.⁶⁶ His concept of autonomy does not fall into the artificial distinction between negative and positive freedom, and it is much more

⁶⁵ Hartmann, *Ethics*, vol. 3: *Moral Freedom*, 67.

⁶⁶ It's worth noting that Hartmann's monumental ontology, epistemology and ethics go far beyond contemporary analytical attempts to solve the problem of free will. A broad description of the structure of strata and dependencies in the real world constitutes the basis of an equally monumental, ontologically and axiologically justified concept of free will: Hartmann, *New Ways of Ontology*, 129.

productive than simple, standard arguments against free will. The determinism objection and the randomness objection are limited to deterministic monism.

In addition, the connections between the two positions are often more subtle than the basic dichotomies and starting points in defining key terms. Compatibilists should allow for forms of negative freedom (or an openness of determinacy – as Hartmann did), and the incompatibilists should contend with the incompatibilist mountain. However, this would require a broader consideration.

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Streszczenie

Pluralizm determinacyjny Nicolaia Hartmanna w kontekście założeń kompatybilizmu i libertarianizmu

Artykuł prezentuje filozofię wolności Nicolaia Hartmanna w kontekście wybranych założeń sporu między kompatybilizmem a inkompatybilizmem. W części I omawiam podstawowe trudności problemu wolnej woli za pomocą współczesnego podziału stanowisk. W części II prezentuję libertariańską perspektywę problemu wolnej woli. Część III dotyczy warstwowej ontologii Hartmanna i ukazuje założenia jego koncepcji wolności i krytykę założeń inkompatybilistycznych. Część IV zawiera charakterystykę antynomii wolnej woli w myśli Hartmanna. Część V stanowi analizę tytułowej koncepcji pluralizmu determinacyjnego (o wolnej woli możemy mówić tylko wtedy, gdy nakładają się na siebie co najmniej dwa rodzaje determinacji), której zasadność potwierdziła analiza wybranych tekstów Hartmanna oraz jego dawnych i aktualnych opracowań. W części VI rozważam, czy zasadne jest kwalifikowanie Hartmanna jako kompatybilisty, gdy jego koncepcja wolnej woli wykracza zarówno poza ramy stanowisk kompatybilistycznych i inkompatybilistycznych.

Słowa kluczowe: pluralizm determinacyjny, wolna wola, Nicolai Hartmann, kompatybilizm, libertarianizm metafizyczny

Zusammenfassung

Der determinative Pluralismus von Nicolai Hartmann im Kontext der Annahmen des Kompatibilismus und Libertarianismus

Der Artikel präsentiert die Philosophie der Freiheit von Nicolai Hartmann im Kontext ausgewählter Grundannahmen der Debatte zwischen Kompatibilismus und Inkompatibilismus. In Teil I diskutiere ich die grundlegenden Schwierigkeiten des Problems des freien Willens anhand der aktuellen Positionen. In Teil II stelle ich die libertäre Perspektive des Problems des freien Willens vor. Teil III befasst sich mit Hartmanns geschichteter Ontologie und zeigt die Annahmen seines Freiheitsbegriffs und seine Kritik an den Annahmen des Inkompatibilismus auf. Teil IV enthält eine Charakterisierung der Antinomie des freien Willens in Hartmanns Denken. Teil V ist eine Analyse des titelgebenden Konzeptes des determinativen Pluralismus (wir können nur dann von freiem Willen sprechen, wenn sich mindestens zwei Arten von Determination überlagern), dessen Gültigkeit durch die Analyse ausgewählter Texte Hartmanns sowie seiner früheren und aktuellen Arbeiten bestätigt wurde. In Teil VI überlege ich,

ob es gerechtfertigt ist, Hartmann als Kompatibilisten zu bezeichnen, wenn sein Konzept des freien Willens sowohl über den Rahmen kompatibilistischer als auch inkompatibilistischer Positionen hinausgeht.

Schlüsselwörter: determinativer Pluralismus, freier Wille, Nicolai Hartmann, Kompatibilismus, metaphysischer Libertarianismus

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