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The Ontological and Axiological Foundations of the Meaning of Human Life in Nicolai Hartmann's Philosophy

Abstract: The subject of this article is Nicolai Hartmann's conception of the ontological and axiological foundations of the meaning of human life. Referring to both Hartmann's major and minor, I analyze his conception of human meaning in the dimension of individual life and in the historical dimension. I begin my discussion with a brief overview of Hartmann's relation to the earlier metaphysics of meaning. Then, I focus on identifying the ontological foundations of meaning. In this section, I specifically present Hartmann's understanding of the laws of real being, his critique of ontological monism, and, of particular importance, his critique of teleological monism. I also reconstruct the most important elements of Hartmann's conception of man as a spiritual being, comprising the personal spirit of the objective spirit and the objectified spirit. Another point of consideration is the question of the axiological basis of meaning. For Hartmann, humans construct their specific position in the world by introducing axiological criteria and axiological points of view into the real world. As Hartmann argues, man is the intermediary between ideal values and the real world. The final point of consideration is the problem of historical meaning.

Keywords: meaning of life, values, personal spirit, objective spirit, teleology, meaningless, Nicolai Hartmann

Introduction

The problem of the meaning of life is one of the most important questions facing a self-conscious human being. “Humankind tolerates nothing more poorly than the meaninglessness of its own life. Suffering and misfortune do not impact us as deeply as the senselessness of the notion that ‘it’s all in vain.’ Where we are unable to discover a meaning within our own existence, we are compelled to seek it outside of our own existence – in what lies ahead of us”.¹ The question of meaning, in all its clarity, appears when humans intentionally adopt a reflective attitude and ask about themselves and their life from a non-practical perspective, taken out of the rush of ordinary life. Such a change of attitude often takes place in circumstances that take us beyond the ordinary rhythm of everyday life. Karl Jaspers, for example, spoke in this context of “border situations” pulling us out of our normal routine. But it cannot be denied that such questions are also asked by people in more ordinary situations, e.g., when summing up a period of one’s life, or when looking at one’s achievements after completing a previously set plan.

Nicolai Hartmann developed numerous issues of the philosophy of man in his various writings, both in works directly dedicated to man and his or her activities and in more general papers, i.e., those dealing directly with ontological or epistemological issues. Texts from the first group include primarily voluminous works such as *Ethik*² [*Ethics*] or *Das Problem des geistigen Seins*³ [*The Problem of Spiritual Being*], also *Teleologisches Denken*⁴ [*Teleological Thinking*], as well as minor works such as, in particular, “Sinngebung

¹ Nicolai Hartmann, *Zur Grundlegung der Ontologie*, 4th ed. (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1965), 24. I quote in English translation: *Ontology: Laying the Foundations*, transl. Keith Peterson (Berlin–Boston: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 2019), 35.

² Nicolai Hartmann, *Ethik* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1926); in English: *Ethics*, transl. Stanton Coit, vol. 1–3 (London–New York: George Allen & Unwin – The MacMillan Company, 1932). I quote the original of *Ethik* based on the 2nd edition: *Ethik*, 2nd ed. (Berlin–Leipzig: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1935).

³ Nicolai Hartmann, *Das Problem des geistigen Seins. Untersuchungen zur Grundlegung der Geschichtsphilosophie und der Geisteswissenschaften* (Berlin–Leipzig: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1933).

⁴ Nicolai Hartmann, *Teleologisches Denken* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1951).

und Sinnerfüllung”⁵ [“Giving and Fulfilling Meaning”] or “Vom Wesen sittlicher Forderungen”⁶ [“On the Essence of Moral Requirements”]. I have already given a preliminary sketch of this problematic in “Wprowadzenie do antropologii Nicolaia Hartmanna”⁷ [“An Introduction to the Anthropology of Nicolai Hartman”]. Therein, I identified four major stages in the development of Hartmann’s anthropology: the stage in which *Ethik* was published; the stage centered around the problematic work *Das Problem des geistigen Seins*; the stage marked by the publication of *Der Aufbau der realen Welt*⁸ [*The Structure of the Real World*]; the stage associated with the publication of “Naturphilosophie und Anthropologie.”⁹ However, in the aforementioned article, I did not take up the issue of the foundations of meaning of human life at all; therefore, I will try to present and analyze this problem in the present text. For an orderly and systematic reconstruction of Hartmann’s views on this matter, I also will first refer to most of these texts, which I previously treated as tools for indicating a possible periodization of Hartmann’s thought in terms of his anthropological views. However, to reconstruct Hartmann’s understanding of the ontological and axiological foundations of meaning of life, I will also refer to “Sinnggebung und Sinnerfüllung”, “Vom Wesen sittlicher Forderungen”, and *Teleologisches Denken*. “Sinnggebung und Sinnerfüllung” is directly devoted to the various dimensions of the meaning of life. “Vom Wesen sittlicher Forderungen” takes up the axiological-ethical problematic; *Teleologisches Denken* contains analyses of various types of teleology; the problematic of both works is an essential component of the problem-

⁵ Nicolai Hartmann, “Sinnggebung und Sinnerfüllung”, in: Nicolai Hartmann, *Kleinere Schriften*, vol. 1: *Abhandlungen zur systematischen Philosophie* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1955), 245–279.

⁶ Nicolai Hartmann, “Vom Wesen sittlicher Forderungen”, in: Nicolai Hartmann, *Kleinere Schriften*, vol. 1, 279–311.

⁷ Leszek Kopciuch, “Wprowadzenie do antropologii Nicolaia Hartmanna”, in: *Uomo universale. Rozważania o człowieku, społeczeństwie i wartościach poświęcone pamięci Profesora Stanisława Jedynaka*, ed. Jolanta Zdybel, Lech Zdybel (Lublin: Wydawnictwo UMCS, 2018), 155–168.

⁸ Nicolai Hartmann, *Der Aufbau der realen Welt. Grundriß der allgemeinen Kategorienlehre* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1940).

⁹ Nicolai Hartmann, “Naturphilosophie und Anthropologie”, in: Nicolai Hartmann, *Kleinere Schriften*, vol. 1, 214–244.

atic of meaning of life (the meaning of life incorporates both teleology and its value).

Hartmann and the Metaphysics of Meaning

Analyzing the positions formulated in the history of philosophy, Hartmann points out what their understanding of meaning consisted of, as well as the errors they made. Generally speaking, the earlier understandings of meaning were, first of all, metaphysical in nature, since they identified the source of meaning in some metaphysical principle that also explained the meaning of human life. Secondly, these approaches were teleological in nature. Meaning was understood as an element of the teleological orientation occurring in the world. It was thought that the world and man could not make sense if there was no teleological orientation, if the processes in the world (natural, social, and historical) were going nowhere. Thirdly, earlier concepts proposed an objectivist understanding: meaning was related to the objective order of reality, while man – as an individual and as a social or historical collective – was only its object, in which it was realized. Fourthly, meaning was treated as a universal order, encompassing everything and everyone. This meaning did not change in history; on the contrary, it was rather history that was cemented together and determined by it. Fifthly, this sense was imagined in Platonic terms as eternal and unchanging. In three steps, Hartmann summarizes the significance of Platonism for the later understanding of meaning: i) Meaning and value cannot pass away, cannot be subject to becoming; meaning and value must, therefore, be transcendent to the real world. ii) Meaning is “general”. Human life cannot be meaningful if the world as a whole is not meaningful in itself. iii) Meaning and value must be ontically stronger than the real world.¹⁰ According to Hartmann, such a metaphysics of meaning was a kind of counterpart to the human desire for a meaningful world and unity.¹¹

¹⁰ Cf. Hartmann, “Sinnggebung und Sinnerfüllung”, 248.

¹¹ Cf. Hartmann, *Teleologisches Denken*, 53–64.

However, this desire can also be satisfied in other ways. Indeed, Hartmann emphasizes that the already changed approach to the problem of meaning appeared, among others, in the philosophy of Immanuel Kant. His very understanding of “enlightenment” was significant. Kant conceives of enlightenment as the process of man’s emergence from a self-imposed immaturity. This immaturity, in turn, consists in the fact that, admittedly, human beings already possess reason, which they can use to make independent, autonomous decisions, but they do not use it. Instead, they submit to heteronomous norms and rules. The Kantian interpretation of enlightenment as man’s acquisition of maturity Hartmann thus reads as through “enlightenment” the principle that gives meaning passes from transcendence to immanence. It is man and his or her reason that now become the source of the principle on which meaning depends. From the perspective of Kantian ethics, the immanentization of meaning implies that human practical reason becomes the subject of moral law, discovering and determining its content. As Hartmann writes:

It is in the nature of duty, however, that by its own essence it sets tasks for man. Man has something to fulfill in the world, he has a vocation and a purpose. [...] In a vocation he finds in himself, he is entirely on his own – in a world that knows nothing of this vocation and rolls with indifference to it; with his task, man stands alone in the world, and against it. Therefore, there is such a cardinal importance of free will in the human ethos, which Kant probably put first. The ethos of man is heroic.¹²

At the same time, Hartmann emphasizes that this new Kantian perspective involving the immanentization of meaning was not individualistic in nature, since its continuation was the perspective of historical change, the subject of which is no longer the individual, but humanity, man as a species. The goals that nature has set before man are not realizable in individual life,

¹² Hartmann, “Sinnggebung und Sinnerfüllung”, 252–253. Also in the context of discovering and properly grasping the problem of meaning, Hartmann attributes a distinguished role to Kantian philosophy, just as it was with regard to the problem of freedom. Thus, here too, one can see the perseverance of the neo-Kantian phase in the development of Hartmann’s philosophy.

but in species life and its historical transformations.¹³ Only such a broadening of perspective from the individual to the supra-individual and historical created the proper space for the discovery and realization of meaning. Hartmann thus emphasizes explicitly that the Kantian concept represents a caesura that ends the old understanding of meaning as a transcendent reality: “It is a decisive step leading out of Platonism and thus out of the whole of the former metaphysics of meaning. This is because the thinkers of German idealism apparently continued the problem in the field of the philosophy of history”.¹⁴

Kant’s immanentization of meaning was also not individualistic in another respect. Hartmann examines this issue in detail in *Ethik* as part of a critique of Kant’s understanding of human freedom.¹⁵ Kant presents freedom as autonomy, only that its subject is not a real person, but a transcendental practical subject.¹⁶ Hartmann emphasizes that real person is a strictly individual and unique entity. The Kantian practical subject as a transcendental subject, meanwhile, is general. Therefore, the general, universal character of the moral law is completely compatible with this. This immanentization of meaning, which is accomplished through the immanentization of the moral law, is therefore not individualistic in character.

The perspective opened by Kant is then continued, with various modifications, by later thinkers.¹⁷ However, there is no space here to reconstruct in

¹³ Cf. Immanuel Kant, “Die Idee einer allgemeinen Geschichte im weltbürgerlichen Aspekt”, in English: “Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View”, transl. Lewis White Beck, in: Immanuel Kant, *On History*, ed. Lewis White Beck (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1963), 11–26.

¹⁴ Hartmann, “Sinnggebung und Sinnerfüllung”, 253.

¹⁵ Cf. Hartmann, *Ethik*, 625–626; in English: *Ethics*, vol. 3, 102–104. Cf. also: Leszek Kopciuch, *Wolność a wartości: Max Scheler, Nicolai Hartmann, Dietrich von Hildebrand, Hans Reiner* [Freedom and Values: Max Scheler – Nicolai Hartmann – Dietrich von Hildebrand – Hans Reiner] (Lublin: Wydawnictwo UMCS, 2010); Alicja Pietras, “Prawa człowieka jako warunek możliwości wolności moralnej. Próba ontologicznej analizy wolności politycznej” [“Human Rights as Prerequisites of Moral Freedom. An Ontological Analysis of Political Freedom”], *Kultura i Wartości* 28 (2019): 141–148, <http://dx.doi.org/10.17951/kw.2019.28.131-164>.

¹⁶ Cf. Hartmann, *Ethik*, 624–630; in English: *Ethics*, vol. 3, 101–110.

¹⁷ About all transformations in a metaphysical scheme of the meaning of human life and a detailed history of its destruction cf. *ibidem*, 248–264. Hartmann also underlines the role of Hegel, Nietzschean discovery of the diversity of values, and the material ethics of value, that

detail Hartmann's opinions in this regard. More relevant to the understanding of the problem of meaning itself is to grasp the error that was contained in the metaphysical understanding of meaning, or, as Hartmann himself calls it, the metaphysics of meaning. This error is explicitly defined in *Teleologisches Denken*: "[...] only the whole can make meaning because meaning by its nature refers to the whole. If the world is meaningless as a whole, then it cannot be meaningful in the details. Or: in a meaningless whole, the parts cannot be meaningful either. The meaningful and valuable content cannot come into the world later (epigenetically). There is no epigenesis of meaning".¹⁸

This view – and Hartmann calls it “prejudice of meaning metaphysics” – has not been formulated anywhere in all its clarity, but it nevertheless defines, according to Hartmann, many types of this metaphysics. If the world as a whole does not make sense, then neither can human life. If humans desire a meaningful life, then they must also desire a meaningful world as a whole.¹⁹ Criticizing this “prejudice”, Hartmann formulates the following arguments:²⁰ 1) Meaning-making can also start from a part of the world, and not only from its entirety. For meaning-making to be possible, only two conditions must be met: i) there must be a spiritual instance capable of meaning-making; ii) the part of the world in which it exists must not actively resist this meaning-making. Both of these conditions are met by human being. 2) This is confirmed by human experience and success in mastering nature. 3) There is no such thing as meaning “in itself”, meaning is always “for someone”. For Hartmann, a meaning exists only for such a being who is able to grasp it.

was a synthesis of Kant and Nietzsche. Cf. also Nicolai Hartmann, “Kants Metaphysik der Sitten und die Ethik unserer Tage”, in: Nicolai Hartman, *Kleinere Schriften*, vol. 3: *Vom Neukantianismus zur Ontologie* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co, 1958), 350.

¹⁸ Hartmann, *Teleologisches Denken*, 110.

¹⁹ Hartmann fails to note that even Kant succumbed to this type of thinking. Indeed, in his sketch “Die Idee einer allgemeinen Geschichte im weltbürgerlichen Aspekt”. Kant formulates the view that we are encouraged to a teleological interpretation of human history by the human desire for meaning, which, in a world determined by cause and effect or containing randomness as an essential factor, would have to remain unfulfilled. Cf. especially Kant, “Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View”, 18–21.

²⁰ Hartmann, *Teleologisches Denken*, 110–112.

The world, therefore, cannot have meaning before there is a being capable of spiritually experiencing meaning. Such a being outside of man himself is not known. The same applies in the negative version: also “contradictory to meaning” the world can only be “for” man, not without him and not before his appearance in the world. Without man, however, it can be “meaningless” from the beginning, that is, indifferent to meaning. Strictly speaking, without him in a necessary way it must be meaningless.²¹

4) In a world that already has its own meaning, meaning-making human activity would be unnecessary. “The meaning of a human being is fulfilled only in such a world that is ‘meaningless’ in itself – to understand it properly, in a world that is indifferent to meaning, and not in a world that is contradictory to meaning. In this way, the meaningless world is the only world for man that has meaning”.²² This paradox, Hartmann stresses, is an expression of a dialectic that does not appear only in our thinking about meaning but is real in nature. If the world must meet certain conditions in order for human meaning-making to be possible in it, the key to establishing the possibility of this meaning is to recognize the ontological and determinative structure of the world.

Ontological Foundations of the Meaning of Life

Hartmann’s understanding of the meaning of human life (both in the dimension of the individual person and in the dimension of human societies and history) has a solid foundation in his ontological views. This applies to both his ontology of real being and the ontological aspects of values (according to Hartmann – ideal entities²³). This is consistent with the substantive content of the problem of meaning, which is necessarily linked to the problem of teleologism and the problem of value. But it is also consistent with Hartmann’s preference for an ontological perspective. In the introduction to *Zur Grundlegung der Ontologie* [*Ontology: Laying the Foundations*], Hart-

²¹ Ibidem, 111.

²² Ibidem, 112.

²³ Cf. Hartmann, *Ethik*, 133–144; in English: *Ethics*, vol. 1, 217–244.

mann argues that all great (metaphysical) philosophical problems contain ontological elements.²⁴ The same is true of the problem of meaning.

When it comes to the ontology of the real world, Hartmann's determinate pluralism is the most important, followed in part by Hartmann's critique of teleologism. This critique is carried out by Hartmann in almost all of his writings, insofar as they deal in some way with the question of man and his actions, e.g., both in *Ethik* and in *Das Problem des geistigen Seins*. However, it is most systematically presented by Hartmann in his *Teleologisches Denken*. Similarly scattered throughout Hartmann's writings is his concept of determinate pluralism, most fully presented in *Der Aufbau der realen Welt*.

If these two levels are the most important, they do not yet exhaust the whole. A proper understanding of Hartmann's determinative pluralism also requires an understanding of the ontology of man as a multilayered being. As the highest entity creation known to us in the world, human being, on the one hand, consists of four entity layers, while on the other hand, in its highest layer, the spiritual layer, it combines three entity forms of spirit: personal spirit, objective spirit, and objectified spirit. Man acts teleologically. This, in turn, means not only that in analyzing the basis of human meaning, one must include an ontological analysis of purposiveness and its various varieties. Human teleology is related to values, which are an essential element in the choice of a goal (people choose as a goal what they find valuable). Consequently, an analysis of the ontological basis of human meaning also requires an analysis of how man is determined by values. This indicates that the analysis of the ontological basis of meaning must lead to an analysis of its axiological determinants. At the same time, two groups of issues fall into play here. On the one hand, value determination is a real phenomenon, for it concerns human experiences and human activity – man is a real being. On the other hand, values, according to Hartmann, belong to the ideal being. This, in turn, consequently means that one must also analyze the position of values in the sphere of the ideal being and, above all, their determinative power.

²⁴ Cf. Hartmann, *Zur Grundlegung der Ontologie*, 1–35; in English: *Ontology: Laying the Foundations*, 11–47.

In Hartmann's ontology, the real world is universally determined; there are no events in it for which determinate causes cannot be identified. Referring in *Ethik* to Kant's position,²⁵ Hartmann firmly rejects the indeterministic solution, according to which at least some real events have no cause. However, this determinism is not monistic, i.e., it does not mean that only one type of determination governs the world. These determinations are numerous; depending on the stratum, one can speak of related types of determinative relationships, such as, for example, causation, genetic determination, determination through heredity, motivation, subconscious influence, determination through temperament, determination through socio-cultural environment, personal self-determination, etc.

In a more systematic way, one can say that the category of determination, which in Hartmann's philosophy belongs to the so-called elementary categories (within the categorical pair: determination – dependence), is subject to particularization and modification in the various strata of reality.²⁶ Hartmann's laws of stratification and laws of dependence address such phenomena. These laws are as follows: the laws of stratification – the law of recurrence (the categories of the lower stratum recur in the higher stratum); the law of modification (the categories recurring in the higher stratum are modified); the law of novelty (the higher stratum has its categorical *novum*, which modifies the recurring categories); the law of distance between strata (through modification and categorical *novum*, the different strata separate from each other); the laws of categorical dependence; the law of power (the lower categories condition the higher categories, but not vice versa); the law of indifference (the lower categories are indifferent to the existence of the higher categories founded on them); the law of matter (the lower categories determine the higher ones at most as their “matter”); the law of freedom (the higher categories are in their *novum* free/autonomous with respect to the lower ones).²⁷

²⁵ Cf. Hartmann, *Ethik*, 598–600; in English: *Ethics*, vol. 3, 65–67.

²⁶ Cf. Hartmann, *Der Aufbau der realen Welt*, 309–318.

²⁷ Cf. *ibidem*, 472–575. Cf. also Nicolai Hartmann, “Neue Wege der Ontologie”, in: *Systematische Philosophie*, ed. Nicolai Hartmann (Stuttgart–Berlin: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1942), 255–275; in English: *New Ways of Ontology*, transl. Reinhard C. Kuhn (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1953), 73–99.

The law of modification is basic to the question of human meaning among these laws. It is this law that states that when a category occurs in the structure of a given layer of being, it appears not in the form in which it existed in the lower stratum, but in a modified form. Of course, in order for it to be only a modification of this category, and not the appearance of a completely new category, something in this category recurring in different layers must remain unchanged, unmodified. In the case of the categorical pair “determination – dependence”, what does not change is that one element influences the other, determines it, while the latter is constantly dependent on the former, determined by it. What, then, changes and is subject to modification? The type of influence, the type of determination, is variable and modifiable, that is, how the first element influences the latter.

Nevertheless, the multiplicity of determination relationships is not only structural but also manifests itself in the diversity of types of determination and their dominance in different societies or historical periods. This double multiplicity of determinations creates a space for human activity, including human making of meaning. As the world is not governed by a single and strong determinative principle, human beings can involve themselves in the process of general becoming as one of the determinants, thus constructing one of the most significant dimensions of their own meaning-making. Two things are worth emphasizing at this point; firstly, the multiplicity and diversity of the types of determination make human causality and meaningful activity possible in general. This type of subjective activity and meaning is clearly revealed in the perspective that is “formal”,²⁸ i.e., when one wants to grasp in general the overall structure of human activity and the conditions of

²⁸ I previously used the distinction between formal and material approaches to analyze the question of the existence of human nature. Cf. my article (in Polish) “Kreatywność antropologiczna” [“An Anthropological Creativity”], *Nauki o Wychowaniu. Studia interdyscyplinarne* 2(7) (2018): 44–55, <https://doi.org/10.18778/2450-4491.07.02>. Cf. also the analyses in *Kreatywność a wartości* [Creativity and Values], where I used the distinction “formal – material” to characterize the values through which the relationship between creativity and values can be defined; *Kreatywność a wartości* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo UMCS, 2020), 70–73. Cf. also the analyses in my book (in Polish) *Kryzysy, kreatywność i wartości* [Crises, Creativity, and Values] where I used the distinction “formal – material” to describe the formal and material understanding of crisis; *Kryzysy, kreatywność i wartości* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo UMCS, 2015), 45–56.

its possibility. Secondly, the historical multiplicity and diversity of the types of determination found in different periods or epochs make possible both the multiplicity and diversity of human meanings and, in some cases, the construction of larger meanings that transcend the barriers and limitations of individuals and generations. Sometimes also, the barriers and limitations of entire communities, through which the sense of entire civilizations, or even the sense of all humanity, can be built.

The multiplicity and diversity of real types of determination enable humans – as real beings – their specific subjective activity and the shaping of the world to the extent that the laws of reality allow. This, in turn, is constitutive of human meaning. If the world were monistically governed by only one principle, especially a principle derived from the lowest stratum of being, the human being would have to be only its object and implementer. This is not only because the lower layers of being are more existentially powerful than the higher layers that rely on them. Humans would have to be only its objects and implementers as well, and above all, as this would be the “one” principle, there would be no other. Humans would not have a chance to push themselves against it with their own type of determination, because they would not have one. According to Hartmann, however, the world is not deterministically monistic. Deterministic pluralism, on the other hand, favors humans and their ideas of meaning. At this point, it should be emphasized that for Hartmann the enemy of human subjectivity, freedom, and the desire for meaning is not determinism, but monistic determinism. Similarly, this enemy is not causal determinism, but monistic causal determinism.

The possibilities facing human meaning-making activity are, when considering real forces, described by Hartmann’s laws of categorical dependence. According to these laws, the determination of higher strata and their categories by lower strata and their categories is only partial.

The lower categories condition the higher categories, but only in existential terms; they do not determine them in terms of content. Admittedly, according to the “law of matter”, such content determination is not completely excluded, but the lower categories determine the higher ones at most as their “matter”, i.e., material or edifice, which in the higher layer does not constitute its specificity. In the higher stratum, this edifice becomes an element of a qualitatively dif-

ferent structure. Full existential dependence and only limited and partial content dependence find expression in Hartmann's philosophy in distinguishing two types of interlayer relations, the first being the relation of superformation (*Überformung*), and the second, the relation of superposition (*Überbauung*).²⁹ In the relation of superformation, the categories of the lower stratum become the building blocks of the higher stratum. Thus, there is an existential dependence and a partial content dependence. Such a relation is diagnosed by Hartmann in the case of the relationship between the stratum of physical being (inanimate nature) and the stratum of organic being (animate nature). In the superposition relation, on the other hand, there is only existential dependence. The categories of the lower stratum are not components of the higher stratum. The higher stratum rises above the lower stratum as if on its foundation. This is the relationship that occurs, according to Hartmann, between the stratum of psychic life and the organic stratum and, which is of particular importance, between the stratum of a spiritual being and the psychic stratum. Since there is only an existential relationship, the spiritual stratum is autonomous and content-independent in its content. Hartmann gives expression to this in the law of freedom belonging to the laws of dependence: the higher categories are in their *novum* free (autonomous) with respect to the lower categories.

The consequence of this is that spiritual entities, because of their autonomy, can be the subjects of their own meaning. This is particularly important because, although man is a four-layered being, the specificity of man lies in spirituality. In order to outline this issue correctly, it is necessary to at least sketch the characteristics of the personal, objective, and objectified spirit, and to indicate their functions and roles fulfilled in the totality of spiritual life.

Hartmann, in *Das Problem des geistigen Seins*, emphasizes that these three types of spirit should not be understood as three different strata.³⁰ Rather, they are three different forms, sides, or aspects of one spiritual life that are interrelated and dependent on each other. Their dissimilarity is related both to their ontological characteristics, which are different in detail, and, most significantly, to their different functions. The personal spirit is a practical and

²⁹ Cf. Hartmann, *Der Aufbau der realen Welt*, 485–488; cf. also Hartmann, “Neue Wege der Ontologie”, 256; in English: *New Ways of Ontology*, 75.

³⁰ Cf. Hartmann, *Das Problem des geistigen Seins*, 61–68.

theoretical subject. As a theoretical subject, it is responsible for cognition; as a practical subject, it guides various types of action. The personal spirit is the subject of a whole multitude of emotional acts, including acts of experiencing values. Finally, it is the subject of will and desire; it makes choices, decides, loves, and hates. The objective spirit is the supra-individual content living in the thinking, experiencing, and feeling of human individuals. It is the basis that unites individuals into various communities. At the same time, it determines the development of individuals, who form by growing into its specific level. It manifests itself, for example, in the spirit of a nation, the spirit of a social class, the spirit of an era or century, or the spirit of a generation. It also finds expression in the various ethos existing in historical and cultural life, in moral ethos, in legal views, as well as in language or even in trends from the area of fashion. Finally, the objectified spirit constitutes, among other things, the sphere of cultural goods, works of art, literary works, treaties, legal codes, and constitutional documents (constitutions are also included). Generally speaking, the objectified spirit is the content fixed in some or other matter, which allows contact between different eras and societies.

With regard to the problem of human meaning, the key role is assigned to the personal spirit. This is because, essentially, it is he who is capable of experiencing and creating meaning, and it is he who can give meaning, modify, or discover it. The crucial point here, of course, is that only the personal spirit has consciousness, is sensitive to values, can experience them, and build choices based on them. Only it is capable of retrospection and prospecting. Only it can plan and act. Only it is capable of freedom. To decide freely, to choose what is valuable, to be able to pursue what one considers valuable and indeed worth pursuing – these are all elements of human meaning.

At the same time, however, from Hartmann's views, it seems to follow that the objective spirit also participates in this construction and making of meaning. Nevertheless, its participation is of a different kind and order than that of the personal spirit. The objective spirit is not the subject of consciousness. The objective spirit is only the object of consciousness,³¹ its subject is

³¹ Hartmann stresses that this thesis was already formulated by Hegel. For Hartmann, it is testimony to the fact that Hegel's philosophy contains discernments whose validity is not con-

the personal spirit. However, the personal spirit is determined by the objective spirit. And in this sense, it can be said that the objective spirit also has a part in the process of making and fulfilling meaning. However, this determination of the personal spirit by the objective spirit is not understood by Hartmann in the Hegelian way. Among the various differences occurring here,³² there are a few of particular relevance when it comes to the problem of meaning. First, the objective spirit is not a substance, as in Hegel's philosophy, but rather only overrides the personal spirit (*Superexistenz*). Secondly, on the one hand, the objective spirit determines the cultural preferences of individuals, including the extent of their axiological sensitivity, but also, on the other hand, the personal spirit is not just a passive object of this determination. The personal spirit can, through its own initiative, modify this determination; it can also initiate new currents or transformations in the trends of the objective spirit. This is also an expression of what, with regard to spiritual being, Hartmann calls the relationship of mutual complementarity and reliance on each other. This type of creative initiative is the task and accomplishment of great historical figures, great individuals. At the same time, however, even their activity is only limited. Hartmann states that the consciousness of the personal spirit is "inadequate".³³ Thirdly, Hartmann distinguishes between two types of determining the present spirit through tradition. It can be a "tacit" determination, without knowledge or awareness, a penetration of the past into the future without conscious knowledge of it. However, it can also be a conscious renaissance, or a conscious and intentional reference to the past and the already past spirit.³⁴ Such intentional and conscious reference is the work of a personal spirit. As in the second case, it is most often the work of great individuals.

ditioned by Hegel's systemic assumptions. Cf. Nicolai Hartmann, *Die Philosophie des deutschen Idealismus. II. Teil: Hegel* (Berlin–Leipzig: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1929), 302–303.

³² Cf. Hartmann, *Das Problem des geistigen Seins*, 5–8, 170–176. I wrote about Hartmann's critique of Hegel's position in: *Człowiek i historia u Nicolai Hartmanna* [*Man and History in Nicolai Hartmann*] (Lublin: Wydawnictwo UMCS, 2007). Cf. also Guido Renggli, *Die Philosophie des objektiven Geistes bei Nicolai Hartmann mit Berücksichtigung Hegels* (Zürich: Juris Druck + Verlag, 1973).

³³ Cf. Hartmann, *Das Problem des geistigen Seins*, 260–290.

³⁴ Cf. *ibidem*, 30–32.

For human creativity and meaning-making, there is one more property of the objective spirit that is extremely important, namely, that the objective spirit is the subject of the historical process. Thus, it is that dimension in which contacts between different generations, communities, and nations take place, along with the exchange and continuation of their achievements. And yet, in the dimension of the objective spirit, criticism, modification, or even rejection of this heritage also takes place. Those elements of human meaning that have a supra-individual dimension and require intergenerational cooperation, exchange, and continuation of achievements because they exceed the capacity of the individual, have their ontological foundation precisely in the objective spirit. This is why Hartmann attributed such an important role in the process of discovering the real nature of human meaning to Kantian social philosophy.

However, this specific function of the objective spirit – as the subject of history and, at the same time, the factor that makes meaning possible on a supra-individual scale – would not be possible without the objectified spirit. Hartmann defines it as spiritual content fixed in a stable material medium. This spirit is two-layered.³⁵ Thanks to this material medium, spiritual content can last longer than its creator and can be passed from generation to generation, can pass between even far distant eras. Contact with the past and its heritage, the continuation of this heritage, and its creative development have their condition in the possibility of contact with this heritage. This possibility

³⁵ Cf. *ibidem*, 384–386. Cf. also Martin Morgenstern, *Nicolai Hartmann. Grundlinien der wissenschaftlich orientierten Philosophie* (Tübingen–Basel: Francke Verlag, 1992), 180. However, the thesis of the two-layeredness of objectified spirit raises a significant problem on the grounds of Hartmann's ontology of spirit since the thesis would have to imply that in the layer of spirit the layer of matter returns. It would be difficult to rationalize such a thesis. I have already written about the trouble with Hartmann's concept of objectified spirit several times in texts published in Polish: *Człowiek i historia u Nicolai Hartmanna*, 37–44; also in: "O różnicy w budowie dzieła sztuki u R. Ingardena i Nicolai Hartmanna (o zarzutach R. Ingardena względem N. Hartmanna)" ["On the Difference in the Structure of the Work of Art in R. Ingarden and N. Hartmann (on Ingarden's Objections to N. Hartmann)"], *Kwartalnik Filozoficzny* 36(2) (2008): 101–114; "Nicolai Hartmanna koncepcja ducha zobiektywizowanego i jej główna trudność" ["Nicolai Hartmann's Concept of the Objectified Spirit and Its Main Difficulty"], *Idea. Studia nad strukturą i rozwojem pojęć filozoficznych* 25 (2013): 95–106, <https://doi.org/10.15290/idea.2013.25.05>.

is provided precisely by the objectified spirit. Thus, if the idea of the fulfillment of human meaning requires recourse to history as the field of realization of this meaning, the objectified spirit becomes another ontic condition that makes this possible.

Meaning and Teleology

“In a world that would be purpose-directed from the beginning towards the realization of values, and in which every individual event would be included in this purpose-directedness, freedom of will could not exist. Man would be a limine, devoid of it, over his head, it would be decided from above, all that ‘should’ happen; he himself could decide nothing”.³⁶ The above quote demonstrates the most important level of Hartmann’s attitude toward teleology. Two moments in these statements are of paramount importance. First, Hartmann does not refer to teleology as such, but only to a universal, general teleologism, that is, a teleologism that encompasses by its authority all events occurring in the world. Second, this teleologism must be intrinsically more powerful than all other subordinate types of determination.³⁷

The explanation for this position is at least threefold. Firstly, if the world were governed by such a universal teleologism, humans, as spiritual beings, would not have the advantage they have as the highest beings in the world. Possessing a spiritual layer, humans can be autonomous from other layers of reality and use them in their actions to the extent that their knowledge and the nature of those other layers allow. People could not actually create their own meaning, nor could they effectively incorporate other entities into their own meaning, for these would be part of a different teleological structure. Secondly, a universal teleology, precisely as universal, would have to have

³⁶ Hartmann, “Sinnegebung und Sinnerfüllung”, 272.

³⁷ I therefore argue that Dähler’s critique is misguided. Cf. Jacinta M. Dähler, *Zur Freiheitslehre von Nicolai Hartmann* (Freiburg in der Schweiz: Paulusdruckerei, 1952), 21–26. Although Dähler critiques Hartmann’s position against teleologism by stressing its compatibility with human subjectivity and freedom, she fails to recognize the specificity of Hartmann’s conception of teleology. Cf. also Kopciuch, *Człowiek i historia u Nicolaia Hartmanna*, 92–93.

its own ontological source, guaranteeing its universality. In competition with such strong and universal teleology, human teleology would be weaker; it would stand on the losing end. This is exemplified for Hartmann by the weak position of human beings against such a teleology, whose source is God.³⁸ Thirdly, to such a universal teleology, humans could not add their own ends, using this teleology as a means for their own actions. This is because, for Hartmann, the structure of the goal-relationship is closed, which means that other goals cannot be added to such a relationship; otherwise, it would lead to breaking up that relationship and turning it into a mere means. In other words, what was a goal would become a means. It is different with the cause-and-effect relationship. This one is “open-ended”, goals can be added to it, and it can be treated as a means to achieve them. The cause-and-effect relationship is indifferent to whether someone uses it as a means or not. The goal relationship is no longer indifferent. We are also familiar with this phenomenon from practical situations when people defend themselves from being used instrumentally. This also has its ethical version, revealed in the prohibition against treating others as (only) a means.

In summary, Hartmann believes that a universal and strong teleologism makes human meaning-making impossible. At the same time, he points out that a non-monistic causalism is a condition for human meaning-making. Individuals give meaning to themselves and to the world by using the causal relations existing in the world. In this way, these causal relations become the means of human purpose and meaning-making. It is clear that ontological explanations play an important role in understanding human meaning.

Axiological Foundations of the Meaning of Life

For Hartmann, man is a teleological being, i.e., a being who acts purposefully. On the one hand, the intentionality characteristic of purposeful action,

³⁸ This is precisely why Scheler counts Hartmann among the representatives of *postulative atheism of seriousness and responsibility*; God and his strong teleology make human subjectivity and teleology impossible. Cf. Max Scheler, *Mensch und Geschichte* (Zürich: Verlag der Neuen Schweizer Rundschau, 1929), 55–59.

by its very nature, requires reference to values. This is primarily related to the peculiarities of the second phase of purposive action, i.e., the choice of the goal. For a person, the goal can become only that which he or she considers valuable. On the other hand, it is related to the deepest sense of human freedom, which is revealed in man's relationship to values. It should also be reiterated here that for Hartmann, man is a mediator between the ideal realm – which here means the realm of values – and the realm of the real.³⁹ The possibility of such mediation lies at the heart of specifically human action, which, as a kind of purposiveness, must always be related to values. Human meaning, therefore, also has an axiological foundation. It is also important because only humans are capable of this mediation. The meaning in question here is, therefore, specifically human.

Hartmann writes: "What is meaningful in life is something related to values in general. And what is valuable is something that gives this orientation a point of direction and a content".⁴⁰ If human meaning is based on values, it is crucial to determine how Hartmann understands the very status of values themselves, and the nature of the relationship that occurs between values and man. If values were to determine man in a necessary way, human meaning-making would be devoid of subjectivity, and it would be difficult to expect man to achieve self-fulfillment in this way.

Hartmann classifies values as ideal beings that are independent of the real world and personal acts of valuation. As ideal entities, values are a-temporal and non-processual. As independent of acts of valuation, they are not subjective, but objective. Persons do not create them, rather they only discover them. As independent of the real world, values do not fall under relativism. What changes in the context of, for example, historical or social changes, are not the values themselves, but only their actuality and validity. Human consciousness of values is also changing, but this consciousness is not the same as the values themselves, it is rather only their experience or cognition.⁴¹

³⁹ Cf. Hartmann, *Ethik*, 566–568; in English: *Ethics*, vol. 3, 21–22.

⁴⁰ Hartmann, "Sinnggebung und Sinnerfüllung", 262.

⁴¹ Cf. Nicolai Hartmann, "Das Wertproblem in der Philosophie der Gegenwart", in: Nicolai Hartmann, *Kleinere Schriften*, vol. 3: *Vom Neukantianismus zur Ontologie* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1958), 327–332.

Two types of axiological determination are relevant to the proper determination of the possibility of human meaning-making: determination occurring in the experience/cognition of value⁴² and determination occurring in will and action. Determination in the experience/cognition of value is unidirectional, in the sense that the correct value capture is determined by value. This capture of values does not create them, but rather “reproduces” them (both in their content and “ought”). The person’s activity, however, is not unimportant: an adequate grasp of values often requires the person to adopt the right cognitive attitude. It is different in the determination by value contained in will and action. The will is free in the face of values since the subject has the freedom towards values to assume their determination or to reject it. Determination of the will by value is not direct, but “refracted”.⁴³ The value determines the will only if the will accepts the value and wishes to implement it. Determination by value “breaks down” in the prism of human will’s acquiescence. Thus, it can be said that at the level of the will, human subjectivity toward value is maximal, while in experience/cognition, this subjectivity minimizes. Human subjectivity towards values manifested in the decision of will is also transferred to the level of action, for this, one could say, is a continuation of the decision of will and leads to the “realization” of values in the real world. If it was said a moment ago that in the experience/cognition of value, the value determines its content, while in the decision of the will, the value determines only if the will opts for it, this picture can now be supplemented

⁴² Cf. Hartmann, *Ethik*, 104–106; in English: *Ethics*, vol. 1, 176–179; Hartmann, *Grundzüge einer Metaphysik der Erkenntnis*, 4th ed. (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1949), 553–556. The distinction between emotional experience (value feeling) and cognition of value is widely presented by various authors as belonging to the material ethics of value. The experience of value is primary in the phenomenological sense, the cognition of value is secondary to this experience and is revealed in theoretical terms. On Hartmann’s conception of value cognition, cf. Emmanuel P. Mayer, O.F.M., *Die Objektivität der Werterkenntnis bei Nicolai Hartmann* (Maisenheim–Glan: Westkulturverlag Anton Hain, 1952), 17–68; Leszek Kopciuch, “Nicolai Hartmann’s Ethics. Feeling and Cognition of Values: Between Emotionalism and Rationalism”, *Ruch Filozoficzny* 77(3) (2022): 39–64; <https://doi.org/10.12776/RF.2022.022>.

⁴³ Cf. Nicolai Hartmann, *Einführung in die Philosophie. Vorlesungsnachschrift. Überarbeitete, vom Verfasser genehmigte Nachschrift der Vorlesung im Sommersemester 1949 in Göttingen*, 3rd ed. (Osnabrück: Luise Hanckel Verlag, 1954), 181.

by Hartmann's concept of the strength and powerlessness of values. Values are strong, they determine the content of the experience/cognition of value. Values are powerless in relation to the will, i.e., in relation to its self-determination. But values are also strong in another sense: namely, they are the criterion of every human choice. Humans choose only what they consider valuable. But, at the same time, values are powerless to compel the will to make such a choice. This antinomic situation leads Hartmann to an extremely precise and profound analysis of the problem of freedom and to formulate several antinomies of will and values.⁴⁴ Regardless of their evaluation, it is clear that for Hartmann, determination by value, as it requires acceptance of the will, makes human meaning and human making sense of the world possible. The meaning of human life, as before, is based on values, but, at the same time, it will not materialize without human acceptance and activity.

A human search for meaning is necessarily related to values. Nevertheless, it is important to note that this relation of meaning to values does not always imply the "realization of values". Hartmann believes that sometimes meaning does not occur as a result of the realization of values. Indeed, one can say that human life has meaning because human beings, according to their nature and vocation, have the task of realizing values. And this task is necessarily conditioned by still unrealized values. Therefore, Hartmann is right to say that there are forms of meaning that do not rest on realizing values. On the contrary, they are based on the lack of their realization: "Thanks to this, man has a certain vocation in the world, a certain task, a certain meaning of life".⁴⁵

The foregoing considerations about the role of values in a meaning-making apply particularly to ethical values and moral dimensions of human life.

⁴⁴ Cf. Hartmann, *Ethik*, 624–647; 702–727; in English: *Ethics*, vol. 3, 101–132; 213–247. On Hartmann's reflections on freedom, cf. the following studies: Hedwig Below, *Das Problem der Freiheit in Nicolai Hartmanns Ethik*, Diss. (Köln: Gouder und Hansen, 1966); Hans Michael Baumgartner, "Unbedingtheit und Selbstbestimmung – Kritische Bemerkungen zum Verhältnis von Autonomie der Person und Autonomie der Werte in Nicolai Hartmanns Ethik", in: *Nicolai Hartmann 1882–1950*, ed. Alois J. Buch (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag Herbert Grundmann, 1982), 35–45; Anton Schlittmaier, *Zur Methodik und Systematik von Aporien: Untersuchungen zur Aporetik bei Nicolai Hartmann und Gottfried Martin* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1999), 80–87.

⁴⁵ Hartmann, "Sinnegebung und Sinnerfüllung", 263.

In his *Aesthetics*, Hartmann emphasizes that the special forms of human meaning are those associated with aesthetic values:

But the matter is not such that, as one might think, only moral values come into consideration here; the other classes of values, too, play a role, the lower (e.g., vital values), but especially the higher ones, thus those that are at least equal to the moral ones: the values of knowledge and the aesthetic values. It can be shown that the latter are no doubt less preemptory and immediate as the moral ones, but are especially pure forces in the bestowal of meaning.⁴⁶

A full description of the relationship between meaning and aesthetic values, however, would require other analyses. It would require a detailed study of the specificity of aesthetic values, the special nature of aesthetic experience, and the anthropological role of art.

Historical Meaning

Finally, I will outline the most important elements of Hartmann's understanding of historical meaning. The ontological perspective of the philosophy of history, as it is understood in Hartmann's philosophy, is one of the key elements of the reflection Hartmann presents in his work *Das Problem des geistigen Seins*. Its subtitle, after all, reads *Research on the Foundations of the Philosophy of History and the Humanities*. The inclusion of the question of historical meaning in this article is also advisable because, in both "Naturphilosophie und Anthropologie" and "Sinnggebung und Sinnerfüllung", Hartmann devotes a great deal of space to history – as an extremely important dimension of human existence (in both articles, the question of history is devoted to separate subsections).

⁴⁶ Nicolai Hartmann, *Aesthetics*, transl. Eugene Kelly (Berlin/Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2014), 440; in German: *Ästhetik*, 2nd ed. (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1966), 408.

One can situate Hartmann's views on history in the context of different systematic models of historical meaning.⁴⁷ First, one can distinguish between meaning in the formal sense (there are certain regularities in history that give it order) and meaning in the material sense (there is a specific content, the realization of which gives history its meaning).⁴⁸ Second, one can distinguish two answers to the question of the existence of meaning: positive and negative. The positive answer includes the ontological version and the epistemological version (meaning is understood as a hermeneutic category; examples: Wilhelm Dilthey, Georg Simmel, and Heinrich Rickert).⁴⁹ The ontological version includes three possible variants: i) history is meaningful because it is a process of progress; ii) history is meaningful because it makes human meaning-making action possible; iii) history is meaningful as a rebellion against the absence of meaning, even if it is an ineffective rebellion (e.g., Albert Camus).

Hartmann's position seems to belong to the second ontological answer. Earlier, I presented its general ontological and axiological conditions. Now, I will indicate the particularization of this position to the field of human history. I will start with what Hartmann, as Wolfgang Harich writes, is supposed to have said to one of his former students: "If you were to ask me whether universal history, seen as a whole, makes sense, it would fall under my profession. That's what I'm competent in. I would answer: probably not."⁵⁰ How to understand this statement? Firstly, Hartmann thinks that there is no materially definite order characteristic of all human history, let alone a teleological order. In this sense, history makes no sense. Secondly, however, such an answer does not exclude the fact that meaning understood as a materially determined order can occur in certain specific time periods (historical periods, epochs, centuries). Thirdly, as we already know from earlier considerations of

⁴⁷ I dealt with the problem of meaning of history in my book *Systematic Sketches in the Philosophy of History*, published in Polish in 2015. Cf. Leszek Kopciuch, *Szkice systematyczne z filozofii dziejów* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo UMCS, 2014).

⁴⁸ Cf. *ibidem*, 163–179.

⁴⁹ Cf. *ibidem*, 162–163, 180–188.

⁵⁰ Cf. Wolfgang Harich, *Nicolai Hartmann. Leben, Werk, Wirkung*, ed. Martin Morgenstern (Würzburg: Verlag Königshausen & Neumann, 2000), 26.

the “metaphysics of meaning”, it is only the absence of such a universal order that makes human meaning-making in history possible.

In his work *Das Problem des geistigen Seins*, Hartmann poses the question of the meaning of history as one of the metaphysical (i.e., unsolvable) questions of the philosophy of history, among which he includes the following:⁵¹ i) is history undirected teleologically like nature, or whether it aims at the realization of certain goals; ii) is there any force in history at all that can determine its course; iii) whether history is governed by necessity or by chance; iv) does man direct the course of history; v) is human being free, or is he or she an instrument of “historical reason”; vi) does history realizes values; vii) does history realize something that has a non-historical meaning; viii) is history a process of progress and development? Hartmann concludes: “Seeking answers to such questions would mean going far beyond phenomena. These are metaphysical questions of history in a strict sense”.⁵² In *Zur Grundlegung der Ontologie*, the question of meaning is situated so that there are four most-general questions of the philosophy of history:⁵³ i) does history have a goal; ii) is history causally determined; iii) does history have a direction; and iv) does history have a meaning? From these two divisions alone, it can be seen that in the case of historical meaning, Hartmann also links his question to ontological issues, the solution of which will determine the answer to the question of meaning.

In “Sinnggebung und Sinnerfüllung”, Hartmann describes his position on the meaning of history in three points.⁵⁴ i) History is a layered process, for every stratum of real being has a part in it. Thus, in history, in its different periods, different types of determination characteristic of different layers appear as dominant factors. This, in turn, means that even if the subject of history and its transformations is the objective spirit, it does not have the power to be the only historically determining force. The spirit is a determining force, but, at the same time, it is also determined by other forces. ii) In this sense,

⁵¹ Cf. Hartmann, *Das Problem des geistigen Seins*, 20.

⁵² Ibidem.

⁵³ Cf. Hartmann, *Zur Grundlegung der Ontologie*, 23–25; in English: *Ontology: Laying the Foundations*, 34–36.

⁵⁴ Cf. Hartmann, “Sinnggebung und Sinnerfüllung”, 276–279.

the historical process is neither a meaningful nor meaningless one. Or, to be more precise, it is not meaningful as a whole, but it is meaningful on a small scale, in those historically small periods, when man is able to give it some meaningful direction. iii) It is in his or her history that a person only learns who he or she really is. Both by shaping himself through the tasks and goals he consciously sets for himself, and by the actual effects and outcomes of his actions. Even when those actual effects are different from what he thought he wanted to achieve. Hartmann's position here alludes to Hegel's doctrine of the cunning of reason (*List der Vernunft*).⁵⁵ Yet, at the same time, Hartmann emphasizes that man also learns through his or her historical action what he or she is not (yet) and what he or she may yet become.

First and foremost, the above resolves to the transformations experienced in history by the objective spirit (the proper subject of history). However, consciousness is a category of personal spirit, not objective spirit. This means that the personal spirit also participates in this giving and secondary receiving (experiencing) of meaning. Hartmann summarizes his considerations as follows:

Ultimately, however, as it obtains a growing perspective of vision, an understanding of this also opens up to it; it learns to see the slice of the world that constitutes the space of its life in the light of its vocation, and from the darkness of meaninglessness a discernment begins to dawn upon it: that it is it itself, when it gives to this world a meaning which the world does not possess without it, who at the same time experiences from the world the fulfillment of a meaning which, without this its work in the world, it could not have given to itself.⁵⁶

Conclusions

1) Hartmann's reflections on the question of the foundation of human meaning are dominated by ontological and axiological perspectives. 2) The

⁵⁵ Cf. Nicolai Hartmann, *Die Philosophie des deutschen Idealismus. Teil 2: Hegel* (Berlin–Leipzig: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1929), 319, 362–363, 389.

⁵⁶ Hartmann, "Sinnggebung und Sinnerfüllung", 245.

formula “human life has meaning because the world and humans have no objective meaning” does not lead to an individualistic relativization of meaning. On the one hand, meaning is based on the relation to objective values; on the other, the spiritual individual (personal spirit) is co-determined by other forms of spirit. 3) The objective “meaninglessness” of the world does not mean the absence of order as such, but only the absence of a monistic universal teleology. The causal order of the world is a condition of meaning, since man can use it as an instrument of meaning construction. 4) According to Hartmann, humans fulfill their meaning when they give it to themselves and to the world. Giving meaning to the world comes back to humans as their own meaning. 5) One can also conclude that Hartmann’s consideration of the ontological conditions of the meaning of human life shares many similarities with his consideration of the ontological conditions of free will. In both cases, Hartmann emphasizes that it is crucial to recognize the plurality of determinations. Both free will and meaning-making are one of several different kinds of determination. 6) It is important, on the one hand, that human history shows many changes in the consciousness of values and, on the other hand, that human beings have freedom of choice with regard to values. But it is also important that in the second part of *Ethik* Hartmann describes many fundamental values. It will therefore be of great importance to look at the problem of meaning in the light of these descriptions. However, I will take up this task in another article.

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