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FREEDOM AS THE MAIN PROBLEM OF PHILOSOPHY\*

*GÜNTHER NEUMANN*

DER FREIHEITSBEGRIFF BEI GOTTFRIED WILHELM LEIBNIZ UND  
MARTIN HEIDEGGER

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HEIDEGGER UND LEIBNIZ. MIT EINEM GELEITWORT VON  
FRIEDRICH-WILHELM VON HERRMANN (DAS DENKEN MARTIN  
HEIDEGGERS II 2. HRSG. VON HANS-CHRISTIAN GÜNTHER)

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Book review focuses on two books by Gunther Neumann, dedicated to the thought of Heidegger and Leibniz. If one of the books deals specifically with the understanding of freedom in both of the two philosophers, then the other one deals more with Heidegger's three approaches to Leibniz's thought: (1) Interpretation of Leibniz in the context of the making of fundamental ontology and in *Being and Time*, as well as the reading of Leibniz after *Being and Time*; (2) Interpretation of Leibniz during the transition to Ereignis thought; (3) Interpretation of Leibniz in the framework of Ereignis thought. Author's scrupulous close reading approach allows to show the changes in Heidegger's approach to Leibniz's philosophy, as well as sketch out the placement of Leibniz's great themes on the horizon of Heidegger's history of the truth of being. Author also shows that from metaphysics there stems a certain view in the modern philosophical discussions oriented on neurosciences—a certain view on the human being and on the freedom of will. On this background Heidegger appears as a thinker who has looked beyond the alloy of metaphysics and sciences, in which the concept of freedom has been greatly restricted. Heidegger manages (thanks to the radical questioning of Being) to turn the view on the problem of freedom, which appears in G. Neumann's books as the main problem of philosophy—through the contact of Leibniz's thought and Heidegger's.

*Keywords:* M. Heidegger, G. W. Leibniz, freedom, metaphysics, *Being and Time*, critique of free will, *Ereignis*-thinking.

## СВОБОДА КАК КЛЮЧЕВАЯ ПРОБЛЕМА ФИЛОСОФИИ\*

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Данная рецензия фокусирует своё внимание на двух книгах Гюнтера Ноймана, посвященных анализу философии Мартина Хайдеггера и Готфрида Вильгельма фон Лейбница: «Понятие свободы у Готфрида Вильгельма Лейбница и Мартина Хайдеггера» и «Хайдеггер и Лейбниц». В книге «Понятие свободы у Готфрида Вильгельма Лейбница и Мартина Хайдеггера» автор проводит тщательный сравнительный анализ понимания свободы Лейбницем и Хайдеггером. В книге «Хайдеггер и Лейбниц» дана авторская интерпретация трех подходов Хайдеггера к осмыслению философии Готфрида Вильгельма Лейбница: (1) Через интерпретацию Лейбница в контексте создания фундаментальной онтологии и в «Бытии и времени», а также в результате хайдеггеровского прочтения Лейбница в период непосредственно после «Бытия и времени»; (2) Через интерпретацию философии Лейбница на переходе к мышлению со-бытия (*Ereignis*); (3) Через интерпретацию философии Лейбница уже в фарватере мышления со-бытия (*Ereignis*). Скрупулезное авторское прочтение хайдеггеровской интерпретации позволяет показать изменения в подходе Хайдеггера к философии Лейбница, а также определить место великих лейбницианских тем и идей в горизонте хайдеггеровской истории истины бытия. Автор также показывает, что из метафизики проистекает определенный взгляд на современные философские дискуссии, инспирированные нейронауками, — взгляд на человека и свободу воли. В этом контексте Хайдеггер предстает в качестве мыслителя, заглянувшего за пределы сплава метафизики и науки, в котором понятие свободы было существенно ограничено. Хайдеггеру удается (благодаря радикальному вопрошанию бытия) перевернуть этот взгляд на проблему свободы. В книге Г. Ноймана этот переворот становится главным предметом рассмотрения, ключевой проблемой философии, доступ к которой осуществляется через соприкосновение мысли Лейбница и Хайдеггера.

*Ключевые слова:* М. Хайдеггер, Г. В. Лейбниц, свобода, метафизика, «Бытие и время», критика свободы воли, мышление-со-бытия.

In the wide and varied field of contemporary philosophy different philosophers can be found—both ones that develop their own original thoughts in close connection with philosophy’s classical texts, and ones that take part in modern science’s methodological and/or conceptual discussions. If the former are more oriented on knowing the texts and context of philosophy, then the latter focus on the constellation of various actual sciences, which poses its own (often very partisan and one-sided) criteria as to what can be called the contribution of philosophy, in a cultural context heavily influenced by science. Rarely does anyone succeed in joining these routes (dialogues with the classics of philosophy and with actual science), especially in a way where philosophy’s dialogue with science actually gains a new quality—illuminates whether it is “on the path of being, or nonbeing” (Heidegger, 1993, 38).

Such a conjoining perspective is provided by the philosopher Günther Neumann. He has studied physics and mathematics in the University of Erlangen-Nuremberg, philosophy in the University of Freiburg, been a stipendiary of MIT in USA, done physics research with the Fraunhofer Society and as a physicist been teaching in various universities. Parallel to aforementioned, he is also an editorial member of the “Heideggerian studies” and an editor of several volumes of the Complete works of Martin Heidegger, and currently a member of the Scientific board of Heidegger-Gesellschaft. This feature of his academic life’s way has shown itself in publications: his books and papers deal with questions of mathematics and physics, and also with those of philosophy (modern metaphysics, philosophy of nature, phenomenology). In his previous (and highly acclaimed by colleagues) books the roots of European philosophy are thematized—in the book *Der Anfang der abendländischen Philosophie. Eine vergleichende Untersuchung zu den Parmenides-Auslegungen von Emil Angehrn, Günther Dux, Klaus Held und dem frühen Martin Heidegger* (Neumann, 2006) and in the book on the basic questions of 20<sup>th</sup> century phenomenological philosophy *Die phänomenologische Frage nach dem Ursprung der mathematisch-naturwissenschaftlichen Raumauffassung bei Husserl und Heidegger* (Neumann, 1999).

Bearing in mind that in the environment of modern philosophy and science there aren’t that many philosophers of this profile and calibre, attention should be directed on Neumann’s book *Der Freiheitsbegriff bei Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz und Martin Heidegger*. “Freedom” is a theme which has long been Neumann’s point of interest, and his newest book sheds light on several years of thought work in the field of the concept of freedom and the various interpretations of it (Neumann, 2019b, 239–274).

In the book, freedom is looked upon as the “main problem of philosophy” (Neumann, 2019a, 9). It should be viewed not from the point of view of earlier disciplines of philosophy (ethics or practical philosophy in general), but first of all phenomenologically, i.e. to let the phenomenon of freedom appear descriptively. In describing the phenomenon and in conversation with the great thinkers of European philosophy, the question of freedom is begun by Heidegger, thus establishing a durable, 20th century continental philosophy way of thought. In this conversation, other great thinkers are subsequently involved—Kant, Schelling, Hegel, Descartes, but most of all Leibniz, in whose *Monadologie* and *Théodicée* Günther Neumann (following Heidegger) see a new turn in the understanding of freedom, based on the learning and critique of previous tradition. Furthermore, the author wants to show how much Leibniz’s take on the question of freedom is guided by his idea of mathematics, computation and the concept of a possibly better world (Neumann, 2019a, 22). Neumann

has worked with Leibniz's manuscripts, and came to conclusion that previously published editions of the works of this great early modern thinker are erroneous, hence he took upon himself the work of translating anew and interpreting many important textual passages.

Comparing Leibniz and Heidegger's take on the problem of freedom, Günther Neumann wants to show not only the main features of early modern philosophy, but also the notion of freedom used in the discussions of modern sciences, especially those of cognitive and neuroscience (Neumann, 2019a, 49 ff.; Neumann, 2019a, 124 ff.), which the author deems too reduced, although the fact of it being in this reduced form also shows how it is influenced and created by specific early modern metaphysical motives. Author also turns against the critique of free will carried out by neuroscientists W. Prinz, G. Roth and W. Singer—not only because he sees the far reaching consequences of this critique in the philosophy and praxis of law, but also because he sees the historical roots of this critique.

Central to the book is the question how much and how pronounced, in each of the new turns of modern sciences, is the still active, historically begotten mechanistic approach to man and freedom. Early modern metaphysical debates are far from being just “past,” they still determine the theoretical space in which the aspirations and solutions of sciences move around, casting their gaze both to nature, and to man. Depending on the understanding of freedom, certain view on nature (reality) and man emerges; the definition of freedom carries with it fundamental philosophical, anthropological, ethical and legal consequences. With a certain notion of freedom liberation can be achieved, but enslavement as well; creating cultural spaces, but destroying them as well; creating liberating possibilities, but also creating monsters and caricatures of man.

G. Neumann book is a very thoroughly and precisely substantiated, argumentatively written work, with the main aim of defending non-reductionist understanding of freedom. Principle of sufficient reason, problem of man arising in the light of the concept of freedom, placement and significance of freedom in monadology, relations of divine and human freedom, problem of joining the concepts of substance and freedom, division of various forms of freedom, appearance of evil in the solution to the problem of freedom—all these themes are shown by Neumann in the context of early modern metaphysics and in the perspective of Heidegger's reading. He also gives an excellent insight in the question about freedom, as it is shown in Heidegger's early way to *Being and Time* and in this epochal work. Author also gives specific attention to the notion of existential guilt in *Being and Time* (§ 58), as well as its readings (by B. Irlenborn), which he corrects, following a new interpretation of Heidegger's work.

Günther Neumann is getting ready to publish more expanded research on the thought of Leibniz and Heidegger, but this book already shows the fruitfulness and importance of his way of thought.

The book *Der Freiheitsbegriff bei Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz und Martin Heidegger* is a very good, non-trivial introduction in the philosophy of Leibniz and Heidegger. In it is very well shown both Leibniz's thought exchange about freedom with Spinoza, Locke, Descartes and Molina, and also Heidegger's turn to Leibniz, changes in Heidegger's perspective from *Being and Time* (1927) to his later texts and the "thoughtful fight" of the Master Thinker of Messkirch with the tradition of European philosophy for a more primary grasp of freedom—"Freedom is more primary than man within man" (Neumann, 2019a, 159).

In correspondence, the author has emphasised that he turned his gaze especially on Heidegger's understanding of Leibniz's thought since the extensive January 2017 paper read in Rome's Pontifical Lateran University. The *Heidegger und Leibniz* volume published in 2020 serves as a prelude to Hans-Christian Günther's edited multi-volume guide to Heidegger—*Das Denken Martin Heideggers*. In this volume, the author focuses more on those aspects of understanding of Leibniz, that change (or stay intact) in Heidegger's thought viewed through the perspective of immanent development. In this book the author manages to excellently show the three phases of Heidegger's reception of Leibniz's thought: (1) Reading of Leibniz in the phase of making and development of the project of fundamental ontology; (2) Reading of Leibniz during the transition to Ereignis-Thought in the 30s; (3) Reading of Leibniz in the framework of the History of Being (30s and onward).

As in the case of other great Western thinkers, so in Leibniz's does Heidegger try to unveil the "unsaid in what is said." After all, it is not only about the "unfathomable variety of Leibniz's positions and questions," but also about the "thinking struggle," about starting a philosophical conversation with Leibniz—to think about what Leibniz thought as monads, as *Dasein*.

In this conversation-struggle of several decades it is seen that Leibniz is a philosopher through whose works and main concepts an approach to the core and basic movement of Western metaphysics is shown. The author of the book manages to show just how much Heidegger's turn to Leibniz shows a perspective on technology, information, language, freedom, nature and other fundamental keywords of philosophy. And it is not about a mere historical overview, but about the historical fate of the West, which Heidegger tried to uncover with the help of his approach of history of being, in which the transition from Leibniz to German Idealism to Nietzsche is shown (Neumann, 2020, 77).

Both books by Günther Neumann in the field of their coordinated problematics are a very valuable addition not only to the research of the thought of Leibniz and Heidegger, but also a strong addition to the acknowledgement of the scope of Heidegger's thought—which is especially essential in a time where it has become far too easy to see behind every thought uttered by a thinker only a narrowly viewed “political” aspect. The editor of Heidegger Leibniz-Seminaries, and the editor of two complete volumes of Heidegger's *Vorträge* as a part of Heidegger's Gesamtausgabe, the connoisseur of Heidegger's thought—Neumann with his books manages to keep the level of conversation at a very high bar, where a true thought exchange with and about Heidegger may begin.

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