



# Academic Freedom: To what End? Notes on the Ethical Dimension of Scholarship

Ralf Lüfter

*Zur Blindheit überredete Augen.  
To blindness persuaded eyes.*

## 1 Preliminary Remarks<sup>1</sup>

It is anything but obvious what it means to think something through to the end, which is why the question raised in the title of this contribution remains ambiguous, and its ethical dimension may seem opaque. All the more so, as within the context of this contribution, the notion of “end”

---

<sup>1</sup> Paul Celan, *Tübingen, Jänner* (p. 226 in Celan 1983). All translations are mine, unless otherwise indicated.

---

R. Lüfter (✉)

Faculty of Economics & Management, Free University of Bozen-Bolzano,  
Bolzano, Italy

e-mail: [rluefter@unibz.it](mailto:rluefter@unibz.it)

is not related to the sense of “desirable outcome” or, following the same line,<sup>2</sup> a “valuable result.” To be precise, the “end” is not intended here as something that can be achieved by means of something else. In turn, “academic freedom” is not assumed as a means to an end: it is neither introduced against the backdrop of the means-end rationality, nor in view of some preferable final end that requires the institution of the pursuit of research and education in the most efficient way possible. In other words, within the context of this contribution, “academic freedom” is not considered to be a condition for “the long-term interests of [...] society” (see respective entry in the Encyclopaedia Britannica<sup>3</sup>) and thus confronted with, if not opposed to, other interests such as those of a political, religious, economic, social, or ideological nature, or the interests of donors, etc. Although renowned contributions on academic freedom focus on the weighing of competing interests (see Fuchs 1963;<sup>4</sup> Doumani

---

<sup>2</sup> Both, “desirable outcome” and “valuable result,” “follow the same line” inasmuch as they presuppose a certain kind of possibility. With regard to the form of this possibility, it can be said that the “desirable outcome” as well as the “valuable result” allude to what is actual, inasmuch as it is pre-disposed to be brought into act by means of something else, whereby the latter functions as the condition of the former, i.e., as its condition of possibility. Analogously, it seems that the question raised in the title of this contribution follows an understanding in the light of which “academic freedom” appears as the condition of the “end” (“outcome,” “result”) in question, whose actualisation would not only be possible, but, beyond that, even “desirable” or “valuable”. On the other hand, the “end” appears as something that justifies the function of “academic freedom” in an operative context, i.e., in the context of institutions dedicated to the pursuit of research and education. One of many examples for the adoption of this kind of understanding is given by Matthew Finkin and Robert Post, when they define academic freedom as “the freedom of mind, inquiry, and expression necessary for proper performance of professional obligations” (p. 38 in Finkin and Post 2009). As the first paragraph shows, the present contribution does not adopt this line of reasoning.

<sup>3</sup> “According to its proponents, the justification for academic freedom [...] lies not in the comfort or convenience of teachers and students but in the benefits to society; i.e., the long-term interests of a society are best served when the educational process leads to the advancement of knowledge, and knowledge is best advanced when inquiry is free from restraints by the state, by the church or other institutions, or by special-interest groups.” (Encyclopaedia Britannica n.d.).

<sup>4</sup> “Academic freedom is that freedom of members of the academic community, assembled in colleges and universities, which underlies the effective performance of their functions of teaching, learning, practice of the arts, and research. The right to academic freedom is recognized in order to enable faculty members and students to carry on their roles.” (p. 431 in Fuchs 1963).

2006;<sup>5</sup> Finkin and Post 2009;<sup>6</sup> Nelson 2010<sup>7</sup>)—either by underlining the incompatibility of divergent interests and by calculating their respective social value in order to rank them accordingly, or by looking for compromises and by integrating divergent interests in order to turn their complementary social impact to optimal account—, in the context of this contribution we follow the assumption that such a process of weighing remains blind in terms of the issue of academic freedom in the first place. However, this blindness is not considered to be the result of a fallacy or shortcoming, but rather what belongs to the way in which the pursuit of research and education is instituted in our epoch. This way, as is sustained here, led to the quiescence of the original source of academic freedom and thus to the establishment of academic freedom not as constitutive trait of the pursuit of research and education, but as factor for the

---

<sup>5</sup>“Knowledge production driven by market forces that reflects the hierarchy of power slowly restructures institutions of higher learning by promoting certain lines of inquiry and quietly burying others. Over time, the process becomes hegemonic, in the sense that unwritten rules about what is fundable and what is not are bureaucratically internalized and modalities of self-censorship act as a filter for condoning or shunning proposed research, teaching, and extramural utterance.” (p. 38 in Doumani 2006).

<sup>6</sup>“Whereas in the early twentieth century debate turned on the question whether academic freedom should exist, contemporary controversies assume the desirability of academic freedom and attempt to spell out its implications. [...] The draftsmen of the 1915 *Declaration* sought to establish principles of academic freedom capable of ensuring that colleges and universities would remain accountable to professional standards rather than politically or financially beholden to public opinion. They hoped to construct institutions of higher education as instruments of the common good rather than as organizations promoting the private views of wealthy donors or the passionate commitments of transient political majorities.” (pp. 3ff. in Finkin and Post 2009).

<sup>7</sup>“The need for the concept grew out of the long history of universities and their struggle for freedom from church and state. [...] Transplanting the concept to the United States, however, required significant adjustment. Although German professors were effectively state employees, German universities were essentially self-governing. [...] American universities on the other hand were governed not by faculty but by nineteenth-century versions of boards of trustees. As denominational institutions in the United States began to be replaced by secular ones, religious boards became less common. Secular institutions had governing boards often composed of members of the business community. By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries some of the conflicts between faculty and commercial interests that we know today were already in place in the United States. American universities faced interventions in their affairs quite unlike anything the German prototypes had experienced. When conflicts with their masters arose, American faculty discovered they were employees who could be dismissed at will. In response to arbitrary dismissals and the threat they posed to the faculty’s capacity to teach and pursue research in an unhindered fashion and to serve the broader needs of society, the founders of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) (1940) articulated guarantees of academic freedom and job security.” (pp. 1f. in Nelson 2010).

planning, organisation, control, and optimisation of their pursuit.<sup>8</sup> This quiescence led to a point where ethical questions unrelated to operative functionality are ignored. In the context of this contribution, we content ourselves with marginal notes on the original source of academic freedom, in the hope that this reflection may shed some light on what it could mean to think academic freedom through to the end.

## 2 To Think Something Through to the End

In order to understand the question raised in the title of the contribution, let us consider what it means “to think something through to the end.” Tentatively, it can be asserted that, within this phrase, the notion of “end” suggests the likelihood<sup>9</sup> of a finitude that allows for an entirety (whole) which is achievable in its accomplishment and its integrity in the very

---

<sup>8</sup>As a consequence of the quiescence of the original source of academic freedom, the evaluation of the performative power of research and education, as it is commonly practiced today (see De Gennaro and Zaccaria 2011), appears as an exclusive criterion on the basis of which the free pursuit of research and education seems justified and thus is granted to whomever meets pre-established threshold-values. Accordingly, academic freedom is often defined as a personal right reserved for the members of institutions dedicated to research and education (see Fuchs 1963), or as a general right of these institutions (see Nelson 2010), and not related to the exercise of research and education in the first place. In fact, the latter is specified in Article 5 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Germany: “Kunst und Wissenschaft, Forschung und Lehre sind frei” (art and science, research and teaching are free). Analogously, Article 33 of the Constitution of the Italian Republic states: “L’arte e la scienza sono libere e libero ne è l’insegnamento” (art and science are free, as is their teaching).

<sup>9</sup>In order to gain a sufficient understanding of the notions of “likelihood” and “likely,” Ivo De Gennaro’s comment leads the way: “Today the most common meaning of likelihood is probability [...]; in this meaning, the word is also used in the science of statistics. However, this is only *one* meaning, and more specifically one that applies to contingency. On the other hand, in our use of the term, likelihood is a word of being: it indicates what is likely, where ‘likely’ means: apt, fair, (and therefore) expectable, acceptable, credible, promising, thinkable, true. [...] [L]ikelihood—and this is the decisive trait—is *unaffected by contingency*; that is, by mere (or ‘brute’) facts. On the other hand, probability and possibility *are* affected by contingency, for they are themselves measures of contingency.” (pp. 143f. in De Gennaro 2019). On the other hand, the notion of “contingency” characterises “what is always in the foreground in a pressing manner, what is due before anything else, insisting that something be done with it or in response to it. The peculiar contact with such ‘things’ tends to fill up all time and all space; in fact, it has its own time and space, which is a time and space of ‘doing’ [effecting]; that is, an *operative* time and space [...]. [W]e take [the word contingency]—which commonly means an accident or an unforeseen and unforeseeable event—to indicate the character of immediate (viz. unmediated) impact of things, namely the direct impact on our (inert) life-sphere or ‘lived experience’.” (p. 65, *ibid.*).

instant in which what is in question is wholly thought through, and not simply with regard to some of its particular aspects or according to some particular point of view.<sup>10</sup> This is to say that, with regard to the above-mentioned phrase, the notion of “end” may be understood in the sense of “horizon,” inasmuch as, on the one hand, it encompasses what is in and of itself likely to be thought through and thus orients thinking from the outset, and, on the other hand, it defines the scope of thinking itself. Accordingly, the notion of “end” would neither refer to a point where what is thought through reaches its utmost extension or duration, nor would it signify the conclusion of a thinking process or the effect of an action of thinking. Rather, it indicates the horizon within which what is thought through manifests itself as such and in the whole, all the while as thinking gathers itself in keeping with this manifestation.

Thus, as tentatively asserted, by thinking something through to the end, we refer to a kind of entirety (whole) that is constitutive of what may be assumed as the horizon of thinking. Even though the horizontal character of the notion of “end” remains enigmatic, inasmuch as it withdraws each time it is itself thought through, the following emerges from an awareness of this withdrawal: as soon as the horizon comes into view through thinking, it becomes clear that this horizon not only encompasses and defines (by sustaining the likelihood of an entirety that is achievable as a whole), but at the same time it frees towards an openness (by affording the outlook on what is yet unthought and thus likely to imply a transformation of thinking itself). This is to say that, while encompassing and defining, the horizon frees toward an openness, not only by releasing the exercise of thinking from what has been thought so far, but first and foremost by being itself the permission for a different, renewed thinking.

Thus, it can be said that the encompassing and defining horizon of thinking—namely the above-mentioned “end”—involves a kind of freedom which is constitutive of thinking itself and neither an outcome or result of thinking, nor a condition for thinking. This is to say that, in the end, the horizontal character involves a kind of freedom which is not

---

<sup>10</sup>What is “particular” belongs to or affects a “part” of something that is assumed to be in itself “entire.”

achievable in terms of the means-end rationality and thus, in the first place, neither the actualisation of a presupposed possibility of thinking, nor a mere means to an end of enacting this possibility (in the sense of a prerequisite to the granting and the performance of an effective action). Rather, it is itself a trait of thinking as such.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, the kind of freedom which emerges in the horizon of thinking and along with it cannot be defined as independent from external constraints, cannot be defined as exempt from internal interferences. It cannot be grasped in negative terms—in other words, of “being free from ...”, “not depending on ...”, “not being subjected to ...”. Rather, this freedom has to be considered as an instant of true autonomy in which thinking bestows to itself the law of thinking and accordingly institutes itself as free thinking.<sup>12</sup> Constraints and interferences may disturb and repress this autonomy or even threaten it to the point of total collapse and annihilation; but, on the other hand, the mere independence from constraints and interferences is not what allows for thinking something through to the end and thus achieving the horizon constitutive of thinking: to wit, the horizon where this freedom, which emerges within the horizon and along with it, manifests itself through thinking. In other words, thinking is itself the institution of freedom in and along with the horizon of thinking.<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> Here, at last, we become aware of the fact that we do not possess a sufficient understanding of the notion of “thinking.” In the context of this contribution, we cannot elaborate on such an understanding, but we must instead content ourselves with pointing out that “thinking,” as it has been introduced here, is not considered to be a mere competence of men in the sense of an accidental property that applies to him or her, but it is considered to be a fundamental trait of the being of men, i.e. a fundamental trait of being human, of becoming a human being in the first place.

<sup>12</sup> With respect to this notion of freedom, we may learn a great deal from Immanuel Kant, most notably (but not only) from his concept of practical freedom. It would be an important lesson to understand to what extent Kant’s concept of practical freedom could widen the scope of our understanding of academic freedom beyond the limits that define it in terms of negative freedom.

<sup>13</sup> As long as academic freedom is understood as a condition for the pursuit of research and education—i.e. against the backdrop of the means-end rationality as a prerequisite for the granting of research and education as a pursued end—freedom itself is considered in negative terms. The following passages may serve as examples for this kind of understanding: “Academic freedom, the freedom of teachers and students to teach, study, and pursue knowledge and research without unreasonable interference or restriction from law, institutional regulations, or public pressure.” (Encyclopaedia Britannica n.d.). “The need for the concept grew out of the long history of universities and their struggle for freedom from church and state.” (p. 1 in Nelson 2010). “Notwithstanding the increasingly broad reach of academic freedom and the current emphasis on the essentiality of autonomy [understood in negative terms as “independence from ...”; note is mine] for academic

In the tradition of philosophical thinking, this horizon assumes its semblance in light of a distinct question, which, according to what has been said so far, frees towards that undisclosed openness which welcomes, preserves, and shelters all attempts of philosophising and constitutes, from the onset, their end. Thus, the horizon of philosophical thinking is determined by this question inasmuch as it achieves the point indicating the end that orients, from the onset, all attempts to think something through to the end in a philosophical way. For this reason, the interrogative is assumed as the guiding question of philosophy. Before we turn to this question, we shall read two passages from a lecture held by Martin Heidegger in Paris, 1960:

Die alte Bedeutung unseres Wortes 'Ende' bedeutet dasselbe wie Ort: 'von einem Ende zum anderen' heißt: von einem Ort zum anderen. Das Ende der Philosophie ist der Ort, wo dasjenige, worin sich das Ganze ihrer Geschichte in seine äußerste Möglichkeit versammelt. Ende als Vollendung meint diese Versammlung. (p. 63 in Heidegger 2000)

The old meaning of our German word *Ende* [end; *fine*] is the same as that of *Ort* [place, spot, site, point; *luogo*]: *von einem Ende zum anderen* [from one end to another] is the same as saying: *von einem Ort zum anderen* [from one point, or place, to another]. Thus, *das Ende*, the end, of philosophy is *der Ort*, the point wherein the whole of its tradition is gathered in its ultimate likelihood. End in the sense of achievement means this gathering. (translation, p. 360 in De Gennaro 2019)

Ende ist als Vollendung die Versammlung in die äußersten Möglichkeiten. Wir denken diese zu eng, solange wir nur eine Entfaltung neuer Philosophien des bisherigen Stils erwarten. Wir vergessen, daß schon im Zeitalter der griechischen Philosophie ein entscheidender Zug der Philosophie zum Vorschein kommt: es ist die Ausbildung von Wissenschaften innerhalb des Gesichtskreises, den die Philosophie eröff-

---

institutions, the freedom of individual faculty members against control of thought or utterance from either within or without the employing institutions remains the core of the matter." (p. 433 in Fuchs 1963). "College and university teachers are citizens, members of a learned profession, and officers of an educational institution. When they speak or write as citizens, they should be free from institutional censorship or discipline, but their special position in the community imposes special obligations." (p. 14 in 1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure).

nete. Die Ausbildung der Wissenschaften ist zugleich ihre Loslösung von der Philosophie und die Einrichtung ihrer Eigenständigkeit. Dieser Vorgang gehört zur Vollendung der Philosophie. Seine Entfaltung ist heute auf allen Gebieten des Seienden in vollem Gang. Sie sieht aus wie die bloße Auflösung der Philosophie und ist in Wahrheit gerade ihre Vollendung. [...] Die Ausfaltung der Philosophie in die eigenständigen, unter sich jedoch immer entschiedener kommunizierenden Wissenschaften ist die legitime Vollendung der Philosophie. (pp. 63f. in Heidegger 2000)

The end, intended as achievement, is the gathering in the ultimate forms of likelihood. We think the latter too narrowly as long as we merely expect <them to show as> an unfolding of new philosophies of the previous style. We forget that already in the age of Greek philosophy a decisive trait of philosophy comes to light, namely the forming of sciences within the horizon opened up by philosophy itself. The forming of sciences is at the same time their detachment from philosophy and the establishment of their self-standing character. This occurrence belongs to the achievement of philosophy. Its unfolding is today in full swing in all fields of the being. That unfolding looks like the mere dissolution of philosophy, when in truth it is precisely its achievement. [...] The unfolding of philosophy into the self-standing sciences—which, however, communicate among themselves in an ever more decided manner—is the legitimate achievement of philosophy. (translation, pp. 360–362 in De Gennaro 2019)

Both passages refer to the notion of “end” and complement what has been said thus far. To begin with, in both passages the notion of “end” is neither addressed as a “condition for ...” nor as an “outcome of ...”. Beyond that, following the correspondence in meaning between the German words “Ende” and “Ort”, the notion of “end” refers to the sense of “place,” “spot,” “site,” “point.” This reference is not obvious, all the more so as it is not seen in light of the linear structure of the means-end rationality that nurtures the common understanding of what is meant when one addresses “the end of an action” or “the end of a process” in the sense of a more or less desirable “outcome” or valuable “result.” Thus, it is justified to follow up by asking: What kind of “place” could the notion of “end” mean, if this “place” cannot be reached by means of an action and cannot be established by means of a process? What kind of “point” could



the notion of “end” indicate if this “point” cannot be reached by an action or achieved through a process? To what “spot” could it refer? What “site” would it offer?

The quoted passages from Heidegger’s lecture suggest the following answer: the notion of “end” refers to a “place” (point/spot/site) “wherein” the entirety (whole) of what is thought through is “gathered in its ultimate likelihood.” The entirety (whole) is neither the sum of all aspects of what is thought through, nor is this entirety (whole) attained by adding all particular perspectives one can assume with regard to what is thought through. Provisionally, it can be understood as the entirety (whole) of sense-relations constitutive of what is thought through—of what is likely (beings) to be thought through, of what is (beings) “gathered in its ultimate likelihood” (being), of beings in their being. Inasmuch as the quoted passages stem from a lecture entitled *The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking* and address the “end of philosophy,” a more precise answer to the above-raised questions reads as follows: the notion of “end” refers to a “place” (point/spot/site) “wherein” the entirety (whole) of what is thought through in a philosophical way—which is to say, in a way constitutive of the philosophical tradition,<sup>14</sup> i.e. in a way that also implies the sciences formed “within the horizon opened up by philosophy itself”—is “gathered in its ultimate likelihood.”

These answers suggest that the “wherein” cannot be located within a presupposed space-time-continuum and thus cannot exist in absolute terms independently of the human being.<sup>15</sup> This is to say that this

---

<sup>14</sup>It should be noted that the “tradition of philosophical thinking” must not be confused with the “history of philosophy.” One has little to do with the other. Tradition does not refer to a mere chronological sequence of theoretical positions that are distinguishable from and comparable to each other according to their occurrence in history. Neither is it the subject of reconstructions that describe the above-mentioned sequence by merely installing theoretical positions in an explicable order. Tradition, literally speaking, refers to “being handed down,” “being handed over,” “being transmitted.” Since philosophy’s rootedness in the question of being is fundamental to its tradition, and since this tradition is generated by asking this question, it can be said that the interrogative requiring the question of being is the constant source of philosophy. It is precisely this interrogative that, through ever-renewed responses to the question of being, is “handed down,” is “handed over,” and thereby is “transmitted” (see p. 19 in Lüfter 2021).

<sup>15</sup>This as opposed to the conceptualisation of time and space within the modern natural sciences, in the tradition of Isaac Newton and Galileo Galilei. In light of this conceptualisation, the appearance of the human being seems to occur within an already given—and therefore prior to the appearance of the human being—absolute space-time-continuum. Even though, within the con-

“wherein” is neither “here and now,” nor “there and then,” nor “somewhere sometimes.” In order to be (a “place” that offers “site”), this “wherein” must be sustained in the being of men and through the being of men. In order to be (a “place” that offers “site”), this “wherein” must be thought through. In other words, it renders the claiming need of what must be thought through (by the human being) so as to be “gathered in its ultimate likelihood” (as a place for the being of men which offers site to the being of men); it renders the arising of this claiming need, inasmuch as it needs to be founded in thinking as the likely (free) “place” of thinking which offers “site” for a likely (free) thinking.

This circumstance implies, as a consequence, that inasmuch as the human being is, according to tradition, the thinking being, it may be assumed that the above-mentioned “end”—while it is the free place of thinking which offers site for free thinking, and while it needs to be sustained in and through the being of men—allows for the becoming of a human being. This is to say that the “end”—“gathered in its ultimate likelihood”—is the promise of a “place” for being a human being, which offers the “site” for becoming a human being. Considering that “allowing for” means “receiving with favour,” “admitting,” “enabling,” “conceding,” “crediting” (see Oxford English Dictionary), it can be assumed that the “end” indicates the “place” where the human being is “gathered in its ultimate likelihood” and thus eventually freed to become the unique and incomparable human being she or he is, and thus freed to be a human being in the first “place.”<sup>16</sup> The “end” offers “site” for being a human being; it offers “site” for human dwelling and thus is itself constitutive of what may be considered to be the ethical dimension. In fact, within the tradition of philosophy, the question of ethics is born out of a sense of being which needs to be sustained in and through the human being, in

---

text of this contribution, we cannot elaborate on this question, it can be shown how the conceptualisation of space and time within the modern natural sciences, on the one hand, is rooted in the tradition of philosophical thinking, while, on the other hand, it must ignore the implications of this rootedness in order to establish itself as a modern science (see Carfora and Zaccaria 2018; Zaccaria 2018).

<sup>16</sup> Within the tradition of philosophy, thinking in a philosophical way (i.e. philosophising) is considered as a path of liberation, i.e. a path of becoming free and thus of being a free human being, i.e. of becoming (being) a human being in the first place. Consider, for example, Plato’s *Myth of the Cave*, Descartes’ *Meditations on First Philosophy*, etc.

view of the foundation of his abode: to wit, his ἦθος (p. 766 in Liddell and Scott 1996). Ethics, in turn, originates as knowledge of “the [original] dwelling of the human being, [as knowledge of] his abode in the midst of beings in the whole” (“das Wohnen des Menschen, sein Aufenthalt inmitten des Seienden im Ganzen”, p. 214 in Heidegger 1994). In the so understood “end,” and along with it, emerges the ethical dimension in question within the title of this contribution. This is to say that the pursuit of research and education is ethical inasmuch as it contributes to the founding of the abode of human beings and thus to the building of knowledge about human dwelling.<sup>17</sup>

In other words, the “end” indicates the horizon of philosophical thinking which, as asserted previously, encompasses and defines (by sustaining the likelihood of an entirety that is achievable as a whole), and at the same time frees towards an undisclosed openness (by affording the outlook on what is yet unthought and thus likely to imply a transformation of thinking itself)—and thus defines a “place” that offers “site” in the here indicated sense. This is to say that the “end” is in itself and of itself the achievement of an “ultimate likelihood” that offers “site” for thinking, while it needs to be founded as the “place” of thinking. As far as thinking is “gathered in its ultimate likelihood,” it shows itself not to be a mere competence of the human being, in the sense of an accidental property that applies to him or her, but rather to be a fundamental trait of becoming a human being and thus of being a human being (see note 11).

Accordingly, the question raised in the title of this contribution is not incidentally, but mainly, an ethical question. It allows for opening up a way of philosophical thinking which, as we will see, is concerned with the abode of men in the midst of beings in the whole (see p. 214 in Heidegger 1994), while men sustain, in its being, the claiming need of beings to be founded as such and in the whole through the pursuit of research and education: through scholarship.

There is a further remark in the quoted passages, which is relevant for the understanding of the question raised in the title of this contribution. This remark recalls the circumstance that a trait of philosophical thinking

---

<sup>17</sup>The suggested ethics is elaborated in more detail in *The Ethics of Economic Responsibility* (Lüfter 2021).

is “the forming of sciences.” According to Heidegger, this “forming” takes place “within the horizon opened up by philosophy itself.” This is to say that the development of sciences, and with them the establishment of scientific ways to pursue research and education, takes place within the horizon of philosophical thinking and thus remains related to the “end” that defines this horizon. Even though the limits of this contribution do not permit a deeper examination of this remark, it nevertheless implies the circumstance that the freedom which emerges through and along with philosophical thinking includes science as we have known it up to this day<sup>18</sup> (see Heidegger 2001<sup>19</sup>), namely, the science which is rooted in the philosophical tradition. Accordingly, within the context of this contribution, philosophy is not conceived as an academic discipline, and all considerations on academic freedom are not confined to one scientific discipline in particular. Instead, academic freedom refers to an “end” that is, in itself and of itself, a free place of thinking which offers a site for free thinking “wherein” the pursuit of research and education is “gathered in its ultimate likelihood” and thus appears in its relatedness to the human being and to his or her becoming.<sup>20</sup>

Now we turn to the question that determines the horizon of philosophical thinking. Through this question emerges the point which, from the onset, orients all attempts of philosophical thinking and thus determines the philosophical tradition in the first place. This question is, so to speak, the point of orientation for thinking something through to the end in a philosophical way. Accordingly, it is considered to be the guiding

---

<sup>18</sup> In this regard, the ongoing efforts carried out in the context of the platform *ScienzaNuova* (see [www.scienzaNuova.org](http://www.scienzaNuova.org)) are groundbreaking.

<sup>19</sup> An important part of Heidegger’s lecture course, *Einleitung in die Philosophie*, is dedicated to the relation between philosophy and sciences. Here a fundamental hint is given when Heidegger sustains the following: “Philosophie ist zwar Ursprung der Wissenschaft, aber gerade deshalb nicht Wissenschaft,—auch nicht Ur-Wissenschaft.” (“Philosophy is the origin of science, and therefore precisely not science—not even ur-science”; p. 18 in Heidegger 2001). In the conference *Was heißt Denken?* Heidegger asserts: “Alle Wissenschaften gründen in der Philosophie, aber nicht umgekehrt.” (“All sciences derive their origin from philosophy, but this does not apply the other way round”; p. 90 in Heidegger 1984).

<sup>20</sup> In the context of this contribution, the notion of academic freedom is decided by the horizon of philosophical thinking. However, the title of the quoted lecture—*The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking*—suggests that Heidegger looks beyond the horizon opened up by philosophy itself and addresses a way of thinking (and thus an understanding of philosophy as well as of the sciences) which no longer has a philosophical character.

question of philosophy, and thus also the question wherein the arising of academic freedom is gathered in the likelihood that ultimately allows for the pursuit of research and education as the foundation of a place offering a site for becoming a human being. The foundation is originally carried out through the reciprocal coalescence of scholars, through the reciprocal coalescence of those who dedicate themselves to this question (or to questions that emerge in the horizon of this question and which are, therefore, oriented towards its claiming need for a response).

### 3 Offering a Site for Reciprocal Coalescence<sup>21</sup>

The guiding question of philosophy arises, once the awareness of the following awakens:<sup>22</sup> the tree in front of the window is a being, just as is the mountain: both are natural beings. The painting on the wall is a being, just as is the sculpture in the park: both are artistic beings. The calculation in the notebook is a being, just as is the formula on the blackboard: both are mathematical beings. What soars to a height and descends to a depth is a being: a spatial being. What is periodically and has continuity is a being: a temporal being. This awareness leads to the plain insight that only “what is” can “be natural,” can “be artistic,” can “be mathematical,” can “be spatial,” can “be temporal.” The supposedly unassuming circumstance that there are distinct beings that, in being distinct, appear as such and in the whole, necessitates an understanding of what “to be” means. It necessitates this understanding regardless of whether the understanding itself is each time sufficient or not. Each time that beings are addressed with regard to some particular aspects or according to a particular point of view, an understanding of what “to be” means is necessarily required and thus, either implicitly or explicitly, involved. The philosophical tradition is born in and as the awakening awareness of this necessity, whereas

---

<sup>21</sup> In the context of this contribution, the notion of “men” is supposed to mean: “human beings,” “mortals.” It is not intended to specify the gender of human beings.

<sup>22</sup> The question raised in the title of this contribution appears when the eye for the above-mentioned horizon of thinking is attenuated. Whereas, on the other hand, raising this question in the right way means that the awareness of this attenuation awakens in and along with the question itself.

sciences, as we have known them until now, stand within this tradition. Sciences define themselves through the study of particular aspects of beings, assuming particular points of view with regard to these aspects, whereas philosophy considers beings as such and in the whole by thinking them through to the end and thus questioning what they are, and how they are, while considering the horizon within which they are. This horizon is determined by the guiding question of the philosophical tradition: What is being? It is in the wake of this question, there arises the kind of freedom which characterises philosophical studies as well as scientific studies—namely: academic freedom.<sup>23</sup>

Indeed, the “freedom” addressed in this collected volume is determined by its reference to the eponymous grove on the outskirts of the polis (πόλις) of Athens (Ἀθῆναι), sacred to the hero Academus (Ἀκάδημος), from which, to this day, the world of research and education, the world of study and scholarship, derives its name: “Academia” (Ἀκαδημία, Ἀκαδημία). Since antiquity, the adjective “academic” qualifies phenomena that are concerned with the pursuit of research and education, whereas the noun “academy” refers to a location where this pursuit takes place in terms of study and scholarship: schools, colleges, universities, societies for the cultivation of arts and science, centres for research and study. However, the reference to the Attic grove is neither merely a geographical nor an historical one, if we consider that its fame<sup>24</sup> originates

---

<sup>23</sup>In the context of this contribution, we must content ourselves with mentioning the guiding question of the philosophical tradition without further developing its richness. However, it should be noted that this question is not just an accessory when it comes to achieving a more sufficient understanding of academic freedom. This is to say that in the wake of the above-stated question, academic freedom could become thematic beyond its conceptualisation in terms of “negative freedom,” in the sense of “independence from...” (e.g., the subjection of political power, religious intrusion, or economic influences). However, it must also be acknowledged that the conceptualisation of academic freedom in terms of “negative freedom” is by far the prevailing one (see, for example, 1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure, published by the American Association of University Professors). In light of this prevalence, the reference to the above-mentioned Attic grove appears to be merely geographical or historical and, therefore, a negligible side issue. As a consequence, the inherent richness of the above-mentioned guiding question of the philosophical tradition is hardly ever noticed and lies idle with regard to the conceptualisation of academic freedom. Academic freedom is then considered to be a mere condition for an end (the pursuit of research and education, the pursuit of true thinking) which is, in and of itself, not freedom.

<sup>24</sup>Here the word “fame” is not meant to indicate that the above-mentioned grove is somehow “famous,” “well known,” or “prominent” due to the historical fact that “academy” (meaning the

from the circumstance that it defines the “place” that offered “site” for the reciprocal coalescence<sup>25</sup> of those who dedicated themselves to questions that emerge in the horizon of the guiding question of the philosophical tradition: what is being?

Reciprocal coalescence originates from this question and grows in the light of this question. The question itself requires those who dedicate themselves to it and thus take care of what is in question with it: in other words, scholars. Through their dedication and care, the question is founded as a free place of thinking which offers a site for free thinking—or, in other words, according to what was said above, as the “point” where the human being is “gathered in its ultimate likelihood” and thus eventually freed towards its own being. The foundation of this “place” occurs through the pursuit of research and education, which, in turn, builds on the “site” offered through this question. This is to say that the name “academia” must be reserved for this kind of “place,” for this kind of “site,”

---

Platonic Academy) reputedly derives from the name of the hero to whom the grove is sacred, and, since then, is generally applied to institutions dedicated to scholarship. “Fame” rather refers to what is brought to light by means of the grove: the offering of a site for the reciprocal coalescence of men who dedicate themselves to the warding of what concerns thinking in the first place and thus, in turn, needs to be held in ward through thinking. So, for the first time, thinking (in terms of philosophical thinking) appears as the original institution of this offering. Thus, the name “academy” refers to the offering of a site that may be instituted through the ward of what originally requires thinking and, in turn, what is said to be “academic” (academic freedom, academic responsibility, academic teaching as well as academic courses, academic education as well as academic positions, academic titles as well as academic honours).

<sup>25</sup> Plato speaks about this reciprocal coalescence in the *Seventh Letter*: ῥητὸν γὰρ οὐδαμῶς ἐστὶν ὡς ἄλλα μαθήματα, ἀλλ’ ἐκ πολλῆς συνουσίας γιγνομένης περὶ τὸ πρᾶγμα αὐτὸ καὶ τοῦ συζῆν ἐξαιφνης, οἷον ἀπὸ πυρὸς πηδήσαντος ἐξαφθὲν φῶς, ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ γενόμενον αὐτὸ ἑαυτὸ ἦδη τρέφει. (Plat. epist. 341 c). Following the translation of this passage given by Martin Heidegger in a lecture course during the 1928/1929 winter term at the University of Freiburg, it can be understood in the following way: “What philosophy questions, cannot be said, cannot be recounted, but is something that is generated and was generated in the soul thanks to a genuine being together, a being in coalescence with the abiding of what is in question, something that arises and grows from this taking care of what is in question, in a reciprocal coalescence.” There, and only there, according to Plato, philosophising takes place, “in the same way as when the spark of a fire leaps over from one to the other, kindling the clear sphere and the discerning light in which being makes itself visible” (see p. 220 in Heidegger 2001. The Italian translation of Heidegger’s lecture course—provided by Maurizio Borghi in collaboration with Ivo De Gennaro and Gino Zaccaria—is particularly helpful for the understanding of what is said in Plato’s *Seventh Letter*. See Heidegger 2007). This is to say that the aforementioned warding of what concerns thinking in the first place, according to Plato, is carried out through philosophising which, in turn, requires the reciprocal coalescence of those who dedicate themselves to what philosophy questions in the first place, and thus concerns philosophical thinking throughout its tradition: what is (the) being(ness) of beings)?

and not for a geographically determinable location nor for a historically verifiable fact. This applies also to the “freedom” that originates from this “place,” from this “site”—that originates from what emerges through the guiding question of the tradition of philosophy: what is being?<sup>26</sup>

Alles Seiende ist im Sein. Solches zu hören, klingt für unser Ohr trivial, wenn nicht gar beleidigend. Denn darum, daß das Seiende in das Sein gehört, braucht sich niemand zu kümmern. Alle Welt weiß: Seiendes ist solches, was ist. Was steht dem Seienden anderes frei als dies: zu sein? Und dennoch: gerade dies, daß das Seiende im Sein versammelt bleibt, daß im Scheinen von Sein das Seiende erscheint, dies setzte die Griechen, und sie zuerst und sie allein, in das Erstaunen. Seiendes im Sein: dies wurde für die Griechen das Erstaunlichste.

Indessen mußstensogar die Griechen die Erstaunlichkeit dieses Erstaunlichsten retten und schützen—gegen den Zugriff des sophistischen Verstandes, der für alles eine für jedermann sogleich verständliche Erklärung bereit hatte und sie auf den Markt brachte. Die Rettung des Erstaunlichsten—Seiendes im Sein—geschah dadurch, daß sich einige auf den Weg machten in der Richtung auf dieses Erstaunlichste, d.h. das σοφόν. Sie wurden dadurch zu solchen, die nach dem σοφόν *strebten* und durch ihr eigenes Streben bei anderen Menschen die Sehnsucht nach dem σοφόν erweckten und wachhielten. Das φιλεῖν τὸ σοφόν [...] wurde [...] zu einer ὄρεξις, zu einem *Streben* nach dem σοφόν. Das σοφόν—das Seiende im Sein—wird jetzt eigens gesucht. Weil das φιλεῖν nicht mehr ein ursprünglicher Einklang mit dem σοφόν ist, sondern ein besonderes Streben *nach* dem σοφόν, wird das φιλεῖν τὸ σοφόν zur ‘φιλοσοφία’. (pp. 13 et seq. in Heidegger 2003)

---

<sup>26</sup> This question is referred to as the guiding question of the entire philosophical tradition. It unites the four questions that are assumed to be characteristic of all philosophical endeavours from Plato to Nietzsche: What is the being of beings? (What is their essence?); What is truth? (Not in the sense of “what is true?” but in the sense of: what is the sense of truth? What does “to be true” mean?); What is man? (What is the essence of men?); What is the right measure? (What gives measure to men, and how can man assume that measure so that man’s existence is a dignified one?). In other words: each fundamental endeavour within the philosophical tradition can be traced back to those four questions, and eventually to the guiding question: “What is being?” (See pp. 251 et seq. in Heidegger 1998; Zaccaria 2017).



All beings are in being. To hear something like this sounds trivial to our ear, if not, indeed, offensive, for no one has to bother about <the fact> that beings <entirely> belong to being. All the world knows: beings are that which is. What else are beings free to do, but this: to be? And yet: just this, the idea that beings remain gathered in being, that in the light of being, beings appear, astonished the Greeks, them first and them alone. Beings in being: this became, for the Greeks, most astonishing.

However, even the Greeks had to rescue and preserve the astonishingness of what is most astonishing—from and against the seizure of sophistic reasoning, which always had ready-made explanations for everything, immediately comprehensible for everyone <alike>, which was brought on the market. The rescue of what is most astonishing—beings in being—was accomplished because a few stepped onto the path towards what is most astonishing, i.e. the σοφόν. There, they became those who strove for the σοφόν and who, through their own striving, awakened and kept awake among others the yearning for the σοφόν. The φιλεῖν τὸ σοφόν [...] became an ὄρεξις, became a striving for the σοφόν. The σοφόν—beings in being—is now sought as such. Because the φιλεῖν is no longer in tune with the σοφόν but is a particular striving towards the σοφόν, the φιλεῖν τὸ σοφόν becomes ‘φιλοσοφία’.

The passage stems from a lecture which Heidegger gave in Cerisy-la-Salle in 1955, entitled *What is this—Philosophy?* Heidegger here indicates the moment in which the awareness for the question of being as the guiding question of the tradition of philosophy awakens, and with it the awareness for a sense of being which requires to be sustained in and through the human being, in view of an in-itself necessary foundation of the human abode: to wit, ἦθος (p. 766 in Liddell and Scott 1996). The sense of being, to which Heidegger refers, awakens as the awareness that “all beings are in being” and that all beings “remain gathered in being.” This awareness is constitutive of the horizon of philosophical thinking and of the forming of sciences within this horizon. For the Greeks, this idea—that all beings are in being—became the “most astonishing” and, as such, the source of their πόλις. However, according to Heidegger, the “astonishingness” of what is “most astonishing” has been threatened from the onset and had to be rescued and preserved by those who “stepped

onto the path towards what is most astonishing” and “who, through their own striving, awakened and kept awake among others” the indicated sense of being. Up to this day, the pursuit of research and education echoes this “striving for”—what is achieved through philosophising as philosophising—what is achieved by the reciprocal coalescence of those who dedicated themselves to the above-mentioned guiding question as true scholarship.<sup>27</sup> The “striving towards” opens up a path of liberation and thus lightens a kind of human freedom that cannot be conceived as a condition for thinking and thus cannot be conceived in negative terms as the mere independence of thinking from external constraints. This is to say that the freedom of becoming a human being can never be attained in terms of mere independence, which by no means detracts from the importance of independence. Freedom and independence are simply different—different in kind. The freedom that is lightened by the “striving for” emerges as the claiming need for a free “place” of thinking which offers a “site” for free thinking wherein the tradition of philosophy, originated by what emerges through the guiding question of philosophical thinking, is “gathered in its ultimate likelihood” and thus allows for beings to be thought through to their end, i.e., to be thought in their being. The “striving for” establishes and builds a kind of knowledge which is itself philosophical, knowledge of the abode of men amidst beings in the whole—to wit: ethics.

Inasmuch as true scholarship is determined by this “striving for”—by this pursuit of research and education—the ethical dimension of scholarship emerges with the awakening of the above-mentioned awareness for the guiding question, which includes the end of academic freedom as the source of a true reciprocal coalescence. This is why it is insufficient to define academic freedom in negative terms as the mere condition for the pursuit of research and education. Where freedom is understood as a condition for the pursuit of research and education, the ethical

---

<sup>27</sup> In fact, scholarship can never be assigned by means of an institutional act. For this reason, in light of what has been said in the context of this contribution, Fuchs’ definition of academic freedom as the “freedom of members of the academic community, assembled in colleges and universities, which underlies the effective performance of their functions of teaching, learning, practice of the arts, and research” (p. 431 in Fuchs 1963) could be misleading, especially if it is considered exclusively as a personal right that is only justified “in order to enable faculty members and students to carry on their roles” (ibid.).

dimension of scholarship is neither rescued nor preserved, and ethics becomes the vapid title for a kind of knowledge which is merely juxtaposed or complementary to an already established praxis, in itself un-academic and thus un-free.

## References

- American Association of University Professors. 1940. Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure with 1970 Interpretive Comments. <https://www.aaup.org/file/1940%20Statement.pdf>. Accessed 13 January 2021.
- Carfora, Mauro, and Gino Zaccaria. 2018. Sul tempo (tra fisica e filosofia). *Eudia. Yearbook of Philosophy, Poetry, and Art* 12. <http://www.eudia.org/wp/download.php?id=2308>. Accessed 8 March 2021.
- Celan, Paul. 1983. *Gesammelte Werke in fünf Bänden. Band 1: Gedichte I* (Ed. Beda Allemann, and Stefan Reichert, with the collaboration of Rolf Bücher). Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.
- De Gennaro, Ivo. 2019. *Principles of Philosophy. A Phenomenological Approach*. Freiburg–München: Verlag Karl Alber.
- De Gennaro, Ivo, and Gino Zaccaria. 2011. *La dittatura del valore. L'insegnamento e la ricerca nell'università planetaria. / The Dictatorship of Value. Teaching and Research in the Planetary University*. Milano: McGraw-Hill.
- Doumani, Beshara. 2006. Between Coercion and Privatization: Academic Freedom in the Twenty-First Century. In *Academic Freedom after September 11*, ed. Beshara Doumani, 11–57. Brooklyn, NY: Zone Books.
- Encyclopaedia Britannica. n.d. *Academic Freedom*. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/academic-freedom>. Accessed 4 January 2021.
- Finkin, Matthew W., and Robert C. Post. 2009. *For the Common Good: Principles of American Academic Freedom*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Fuchs, Ralph F. 1963. Academic Freedom—Its Basic Philosophy, Function, and History. *Law and Contemporary Problems* 28: 431–446.
- Heidegger, Martin. 1984. *Was heißt denken?* 4th ed. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag.
- . 1994. *Heraklit. Der Anfang des abendländischen Denkens / Logik. Heraklits Lehre vom Logos (Freiburger Vorlesungen Sommersemester 1943 und Sommersemester 1944)* (Gesamtausgabe, II. Abteilung: Vorlesungen 1919–1944, Band 55). 3rd ed. Ed. Manfred S. Frings. Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann.

- . 1998. *Nietzsche. 2 Bände*. 6th ed. Stuttgart: Neske.
- . 2000. *Zur Sache des Denkens*. 4th ed. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag.
- . 2001. *Einleitung in die Philosophie (Freiburger Vorlesung Wintersemester 1928/29)* (Gesamtausgabe, II. Abteilung: Vorlesungen 1919–1944, Band 27). 2nd ed. Ed. Otto Saame, and Ina Saame-Speidel. Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann.
- . 2003. *Was ist das – die Philosophie?* 11th ed. Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta.
- . 2007. *Avviamento alla filosofia*. Trans. Maurizio Borghi, with the collaboration of Ivo De Gennaro and Gino Zaccaria (Heideggeriana 3). Milano: Christian Marinotti Edizioni.
- Liddell, Henry George, and Robert Scott. 1996. *A Greek-English Lexicon. Revised and augmented throughout by Sir Henry Stuart Jones*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Lüfter, Ralf. 2021. *The Ethics of Economic Responsibility (Economics and Humanities)*. London/New York: Routledge.
- Nelson, Cary. 2010. *No University is an Island. Saving Academic Freedom*. New York: New York University Press.
- Zaccaria, Gino. 2017. Le questioni fondamentali della filosofia I. <http://www.scienzanuova.org/it/>. Accessed 4 January 2021.
- . 2018. Gli inizi del tempo (Sofocle, Aristotele). <http://www.scienzanuova.org/it/>. Accessed 28 January 2021.