

# Editorial



**A spectre is haunting Europe – the spectre of freedom.** Yet, “no other idea is so universally known to be undefined, ambiguous, prone to misinterpretation and – thus – in fact subject to misinterpretation than the idea of freedom, and none is so familiar despite such unawareness” (G.W.F. Hegel *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundriss*, §482).

Not only is it difficult to accurately define such an important and simultaneously vague concept intrinsically linked to the meaning of life. Rather, it seems that freedom is constantly at risk of becoming an empty vessel or a blank slogan eliciting instant agreement and resonating with individual spontaneity.

The semantics of “freedom” have undoubtedly shaped the dominant ideal of the modern zeitgeist, which strives for emancipation from any form of oppression and authority. The story of “modernity” is characterised by freedom, and the revolution of modernity pursues a transformation of liberation. Further, democracy both presupposes freedom and supports freedom.

## Freedom has become the decisive category for the democratic subject.

The principle that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights, and that everyone has the right to claim their rights and freedoms without discrimination is accepted without question today; as is the fact that the aim of human co-existence is to preserve that freedom and dignity. In this regard, the primacy of truth has been superseded by the primacy of freedom, making freedom the decisive category for the democratic subject, which is provided rather than determined.

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The collapse of traditional societal institutions, bonds and frameworks over the last decades forces people predominantly in the Western world – but through globalisation also worldwide – to act independently and make their own decisions. According to Ulrich Beck, this process of individualisation opens up immense possibilities for global citizens to shape their lives but also creates new anxieties, insecurities and burdens the “subject” has to face “without the collective”. The liberation of the individual in Western societies to make their own decisions is accompanied by the “disenchantment of the world” through “thinning traditions” and forces the subject to constantly rewrite its own biography “without protection”. Commandments, prohibitions and boundaries of a disciplinary society are supplanted by projects, initiatives and motivations: This new sense of entrepreneurship, which challenges the potential of the individual through the paradigm of performance, maximises production but also risks to exhaust the freedom of the ever more burdened subject.

### “Subject without the collective” in a disenchanted world

Further, it seems that the principle purpose of consumer society now is to control and influence emotions, tastes, feelings, and thus opinions and decisions: a specific way to affect “souls” in order to re-enchant the post-capitalist West (a re-enchantment following the rules of marketing and sales).

The ideal of “negative liberty” as the emancipation from the other – the law, state, party, religious community, God, etc. – which has been increasingly realised in the modern era presents the free individual with more and more options in creating their own identity, which can become an unbearable burden. In a late capitalist society, this new freedom is put in juxtaposition with new risks and challenges permeating all areas of life and constantly requiring renewed personal psychological and spiritual efforts.

The “discourse of the capitalist” (Jacques Lacan) exploits such psychosocial constellations by offering *a new model of freedom* based on the paradigm of the object or consumption. Moreover, freedom in this context relates to the individualistic and narcissistic ideal of individual self-realisation, where the consummation of the ego is achieved as a totalisation of the ego (independent of the other). Here, a liberal, unfettered economy (we are part of the first and probably also the last generation of “non-repentant consum-

ers”) is directly linked to a subject that has internalised the market model and assimilated to it.

Paradoxically, the rhetoric of lived freedom or free spontaneity without constraints is systematically questioned in current scientific discourses.

### A new model of freedom based on the paradigm of the object – or an illusion?

The result is a symmetric and antithetical narrative where freedom does not follow an anthropological requirement but represents the unknowable end point of causal chains or a variable in a complex mechanism. Fundamentally – as already established by the masters of suspicion – freedom is seen as a myth that needs to be demystified.

- What questions around the term freedom arise from an anthropology, law, social and natural sciences perspective in a current context?
- What are the anthropological, social and theological consequences of this precarious freedom?
- How can a “positive liberty” be developed in the age of the imaginary?

This edition of [LIMINA](#) investigates these issues starting with the question of freedom and liberation in the Old and New Testaments. A paradigmatic experience can be found in the Exodus story. *Irmtraud Fischer* highlights the individual and collective liberation from slavery and genocide, which resonates in a way that closely connects and transforms humans, peoples and God.

*Thomas Söding* examines freedom in Paul. He points out that Paul’s writing about freedom of conscience and faith contrasted between theonomy and autonomy offers a starting point for a discussion based on the belief that the God of Jesus Christ affirms human freedom. According to Paul, a person can find their freedom in God if they follow their conscience and follow His word.

In antiquity, freedom could only be understood and practiced within the context of a political community, whereas modern freedom emerges as an individual freedom that increasingly distances itself from socio-political structures. In her essay, introducing the systematical contributions of this

edition, *Isabella Guanzini* asks the question whether it is possible to consider a contemporary paradigm of freedom between *communitas* and *im-munitas*. Guanzini proposes an approach to a solution based on Hannah Arendt's work.

*Gunda Werner* analyses freedom in its complex relation with sin from Augustinus to the modern era from a systematic-historical perspective and offers a reconstruction of historical theology on this subject up to the Second Vatican Council. According to Werner, this marks the point where the question of freedom shifted from freedom of will to freedom of conscience. *Reinhold Esterbauer* provides a systematic reflexion on the difficult definition and understanding of freedom of will at a crossroads between neurobiological preconditions, philosophical approaches and religious experience. Here, the ambivalent character of religious freedom shaped by both violence and hope becomes visible.

*Laurens ten Kate* reveals the strategies employed by liberal societies to give sense to the world after the death of God. He believes that liberal traditions create sense beneath concrete plural religiosity and supports this with philosophical positions that link freedom to imagination.

*Hildegard Wustmans* presents a pastoral-theological perspective that puts spiritual abuse as a violation of the right to self-determination and "derision of freedom" in focus. She puts forwards pastoral and organisational-theoretical measures to prevent such misconduct in future.

*Franz Winter* investigates freedom in Islam and analyses the contrast between human free will and the will and omnipotence of God in the Quran. He highlights historical contexts and looks at theories and thinkers of the Islamic tradition.

Three articles deal with psychosocial and economic elements that reveal the fragility and potential illusion of the experience of freedom. The sociologist *Monica Martinelli* analyses the current techno-economic system and the notion of freedom it is based on. She aims to offer a new way of thinking about freedom at a time where the legitimacy of institutions is in question, socio-cultural and political frameworks are being restructured, and markets are increasingly liberalised.

*Massimo Recalcati* examines Jacques Lacan's "discourse of the capitalist", which is the result of the historical affirmation of capitalism, from a psychoanalytical perspective. He demonstrates that this discourse is fundamentally based on dismissing an experience of scarcity, but instead is connected to an individualistic and consumption-oriented idea of freedom that weakens social bonds.

In the last article of this edition, *Karl Farmer* traces the link between trade protectionism and voter behaviour in highly developed countries. He analyses populist trends in connection with economic and socio-cultural elements and shows that, according to an economic-liberal interpretation of natural law, economic freedom does not have to become a spectre for social conservatives.

We hope you find our articles interesting and engaging and that [LIMINA](#) is an enriching resource for you.

**tolle lege – take up and read**

*Reinhold Esterbauer and Isabella Guanzini*  
Issue editors, on behalf of the editorial team