

# Symphilosophie

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**Manja Kisner, Jörg Noller (eds.), *The Concept of Will in Classical German Philosophy. Between Ethics, Politics, and Metaphysics*, Berlin/Boston, De Gruyter, 2020, VI, 272 pp. ISBN 978-3-11-064912-3.**

This volume, which is the result of a conference in Munich in 2017, contains thirteen articles, all expounding the broad topic of the notion of “will” in classical German philosophy from Kant to Schelling and Schopenhauer. Most of the perspectives developed in this book are primarily concerned with questions of ethics and practical philosophy in general. However, this naturally implies discussions about the very foundations of theoretical thought and of metaphysical conceptions as well. In this regard, the close interrelation between the different disciplines of philosophy that is characteristic for classical German thought is adequately highlighted by this volume as a whole.

The book is divided into two main parts: the first one (7–85) deals exclusively with Kant’s practical philosophy. The second, more extensive part (89–262) offers a broad collection of studies on various post-Kantian thinkers, not only on the most famous representatives of German Idealism (Fichte, Schelling, Hegel), but also on some less popular, yet important authors (Reinhold, Maimon, Jacobi, Bouterwek). In the following review, some — not all — of the articles in the volume will be presented in a short, concise way.

Markus Kohl (29–48) argues that two different types of self-determination by rational beings can be identified in Kant’s ethics. Since no such thing as completely lawless freedom of action is possible in Kant’s moral philosophy, at least some kind of determination generally has to be included. While there is a model of “absolute unconditional necessity” that “excludes any form of contingency” (29), a second model “involves a form of contingency which entails alternative possibilities for determining oneself” (ibid.). In this case, “absolutely spontaneous intelligence is affected by sensible conditions whose influence inveighs against reason, which makes it contingent whether or not the agent acts in accordance with right reason” (41). Kohl identifies this type of self-determination as “executive freedom,” whereas the first type can be called “legislative freedom” (ibid.). This

important differentiation offers an effective way to approach Kant's theory. At the end of his consideration, Kohl discusses different "worries" that Kant's moral philosophy raises as soon as a contemporary "naturalistic worldview" (47) is taken into account, leading to the result that this worldview contradicts Kant's position. However, it does not become completely clear what these "worries" actually mean and imply on a systematic level.

Halla Kim (49–70) discusses the topic of the "will in the context of our moral failure" (49) according to Kant and compares his earlier conception of a "natural dialectics" in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* to his later "radical evil" in the *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*. While the former conception appears to be a particular failure of the individual, the latter is rather a general failure of the human species. As Kim demonstrates, the problem of a natural dialectics (meaning that the will gets into conflict with itself, see 53) can be solved by Kant's general model of transcendental idealism (68). In contrast, the problem of humans falling into radical evil remains a mystery (58) and therefore requires redemption and religion (68). Kim thus manages to uncover an interesting development within Kant's practical philosophy between 1785 and 1793.

John Walsh (89–104) presents an important conception of early post-Kantian practical philosophy, namely Karl Leonhard Reinhold's theory of the free will. According to Reinhold, "free will" is "the capacity to choose for or against the moral law" (89). In contrast to Kant, freedom thus implies the possibility of acting against the moral law stated by practical reason. Reinhold thus puts an emphasis on *choice*. In order to defend Reinhold against common allegations of taking a merely psychologistic position, Walsh tries to show that, according to Reinhold, the mere fact of freedom in consciousness and the knowledge thereof *follow* from the consciousness of the moral law (93). Reinhold therefore rather adheres to Kant's moral philosophy on a methodological level than advocating a psychologistic position in the empiricist sense. With the dispute between Reinhold and Carl Christian Erhard Schmid (97 seqq.), who asserted "the doctrine of intelligible fatalism, i.e. that all actions are determined by intelligible causality" (97; "immoral action is the result of a hindrance of the efficacy of reason", *ibid.*), Walsh also highlights another important, but often overlooked discussion of the early post-Kantian era.

Amit Kravitz (105–123) compares the Kantian theory of the will to the one established by Salomon Maimon. As Kravitz shows, the starting point of Maimon's argumentation is the search for an observable natural driving-force ("Triebfeder") of morality, rather than an a priori principle. Maimon is hence

concerned with the factual reality of morality, based on the observation of human nature (114), instead of its general possibility. By stating that the drive to perfection of one's intellectual capacity and to the cognition of truth is *the* universally valid drive of human beings, Maimon indeed offers an alternative perspective on questions of moral philosophy: This drive to perfection can be applied to the will as well, and the satisfaction of this drive involves pleasure (117). Choosing a morally good will therefore pleases the individual, hence the motivational ground of this choice becomes comprehensible.

Ansgar Lyssy (159–180) presents the theory of the will developed by Friedrich Ludewig Bouterwek, who advocated a decisively realistic position in his debate on the philosophies of Kant and Fichte. In his *Apodiktik* (1799), Bouterwek states that the absolute in the sense of absolute reality has to be found outside of the subject of knowledge. The will, in the sense of a living force (172), can be directly experienced as the basis of one's own freedom and individuality, prior to the "I think." At the same time, external reality becomes apparent as a resistance against our will. Will as such therefore dissolves the abstract distinction between reality and thought and becomes the "Realprinzip" in Bouterwek's philosophy (174). At the end of his article, Lyssy equitably discusses the advantages and disadvantages of Bouterwek's philosophy in comparison with other systems of his time (176 seqq.).

Jörg Noller (181–201) aims to defend Schelling's theory of the will in his *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom* (1809) against allegations of being an obscure "metaphysics of evil" (see 181). According to Noller, Schelling instead advocates a "critical voluntarism" (181) that is based on Kantian transcendental philosophy and offers a "real compatibilism" (194 seqq.) in the sense that nature makes freedom possible. Noller's study is followed by two articles on Hegel's complex theory of the will (Daniel Wenz, 203–225; Alex Englander, 227–246), mainly dealing with the *Science of Logic* and the *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, respectively.

It is just one relatively small step from Bouterwek's position regarding the philosophical significance of the will and Schelling's apparently "dark sentence: 'Will is primal Being (*Ursein*)'" (194) to Schopenhauer's "World as Will," which is the topic of the concluding article by Jenny Bunker (247–262). Bunker uncovers three internal contradictions in Schopenhauer's philosophical system, which result from a conflict between this system's ethical and metaphysical aspects. These contradictions pertain to Schopenhauer's theories of compassion, asceticism, and salvation. According to Bunker, these systematic conflicts can be solved by assuming that the will in Schopenhauer's philosophy should not be considered as the "ultimate

reality” (not as the thing-in-itself in an absolute sense, but rather only relative to the world of phenomena, 254) and that there is indeed some kind of differentiation and individuation at the level of the will itself (257 seqq.). This offers a promising alternative perspective on Schopenhauer’s theory of the will and the “World as Will,” avoiding a one-sided reading of Schopenhauer’s position as radical monism.

The reviewed volume offers many different and important perspectives concerning one of the central notions in classical German philosophy, especially with regard to ethical issues. At the same time, it hints at interesting questions that are left open by this book and still have to be debated, e.g. the relation between Schelling’s and Schopenhauer’s conceptions of the will and their philosophies of nature, or a possible Spinozistic background — the *conatus* — in theories of the will in classical and post-classical philosophy, at least from Schelling and Schopenhauer to Nietzsche.

*Daniel Elon*

**Novalis, *À la fin tout devient poésie*, edited, translated, and introduced by Olivier Schefer, Paris: Editions Allia, 2020, 272 pp. ISBN 979-10-304-2252-8.**

This volume contains a new French translation of the unpublished notes and reflections of the young poet-philosopher Friedrich von Hardenberg (Novalis) from the years 1799-1800. Originally collected together and published in German under the title “Fragmente und Studien” (Fragments and Studies), this volume presents, in over 700 fragments, the final philosophical and poetic thoughts of Novalis, since he died not long after on 25 March 1801, just short of his 29<sup>th</sup> birthday. It is wonderful to finally have this complete French translation by Olivier Schefer, presented in a beautiful edition and format by the Paris publisher Allia. The edition contains a wide-ranging introductory essay by Schefer entitled “Science, art et religion” (7-19), dozens of pages of highly informative endnotes (213-249), a subject and name index (251-258), and a brief bibliography (259-261). The book is a fitting third companion to the two other volumes of Novalis’s philosophical writings translated by Schefer for Allia: *Le Brouillon général* (2000, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 2015), and *Semences* (2004). If they are grouped together with the 2012 French translation of Novalis’s *Fichte Studies* by Augustin Dumont, *Les Années d’apprentissage philosophique: Études fichtéennes, 1795-96* (Presses universitaires du Septentrion), the result is that virtually Novalis’s entire