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HEGEL ON RECOGNITION
MORAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE »LORDSHIP AND BONDAGE DIALECTIC«

> *There is no They without We,*
> *there is no We without They*[1]

In 1995 the member States of the UNESCO organisation signed the *Declaration of Principles on Tolerance*. In the first article, paragraphs number one and two of the document, we can read the following:

> »Tolerance is respect, acceptance and appreciation of the rich diversity of our world's cultures, our forms of expression and ways of being human. […] Tolerance is harmony in difference. It is not only a moral duty, it is also a political and legal requirement. Tolerance, the virtue that makes peace possible, contributes to the replacement of the culture of war by a culture of peace. […] Tolerance is not concession, condescension or indulgence. Tolerance is, above all, an active attitude prompted by recognition of the universal human rights and fundamental freedoms of others. In no circumstance can it be used to justify infringements of these fundamental values. Tolerance is to be exercised by individuals, groups and States«.[2]

The main idea behind these words is quite old; it appears in the French *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen* (cf. article no. 11[3]), and can already be seen in the works of Locke and Voltaire.[4]

What is interesting in these two paragraphs is the fact that tolerance is strictly connected with the recognition (or acknowledgement[5]) of other people's freedom: the *Declaration* stresses that tolerance means respecting human rights and ways of being human and should refer both to individuals and groups (societies). We can see that this document is written in the kind of language common to all declarations of this kind. As in the case of other declarations – *The Declaration of Principles on Tolerance* is not a juridical grounding of tolerance – it can be understood only as demonstration of our will. Even if we consider this idea as our *declarative* duty or right – it is always possible that someone will state that this is also »nonsense on stilts«. If there is a possibility for us to ground and identify tolerance – we should first search for this foundation in philosophy (legal conclusions usually come later).

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1   Translation of Fichte: cf. J.G. FICHTE, *Foundations of The Entire Science of Knowledge,* trans. P. Heath, in: *Fichte: Science of Knowledge (Wissenschaftslehre)*, eds. P. Heath and J. Lachs, Cambridge 1982, § 4.
2   »Declaration of Principles on Tolerance« (1995), *Unesco Website*: http://www.unesco.org/tolerance/declaeng.htm.
3   »Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen« (1789), *Unesco Website*: http://www.hrcr.org/docs/frenchdec.html (accessed September 6, 2008).
4   Cf. VOLTAIRE, *Treatise on Tolerance*, trans. B. Masters, Cambridge 2000, J. LOCKE, *An Essay Concerning Toleration and Other Writings on Law and Politics*, eds. J.R. Milton and Ph. Milton, Oxford 2006.
5   Both »acknowledgement« and »recognition« are translations of German *Anerkennung*. Although these terms may be used interchangeably, I prefer here »recognition« (following the standard translations of Hegel's writings). Nevertheless, the semantic difference between them represents fertile material for philosophical analysis (»recognition« is more epistemological term than the rather evaluative »acknowledgement«).

Tolerance and recognition

The importance of tolerance today manifests itself in individual conflicts of life strategies, but especially in contemporary social politics, which include relations between ethnic and religious groups, sexual minorities, subcultures and so on. The social dimension of the idea of tolerance seems to be the most important because of its political effectiveness: tolerance is an agent for the easing of friction within society and therefore can be understood as one of the elements that make possible the coexistence of societies or the pluralism of attitudes. All these things mean that tolerance, one of the most important ideas of liberalism, is not only the catalyst of freedom, but also has moral relevance and weight (is not neutral normatively). This is why it is very difficult today to make ethical adjudications or even to build ethical theories without tolerance. Thus popularizing this idea – which is one of the aims of *The Declaration of Principles on Tolerance* – should be seen as a normative project and an expression of our morality.[6] From a sociological point of view, it is possible to understand such a popularization of tolerance – from a global perspective – as an objective expression of *universal* morality, higher and more effective than other moralities, in which intolerant attitudes are condemned (for example: chauvinism, separatism, persecution, lack of respect).

It is obvious that minorities often fight for their rights against majorities. They fight for tolerance – or in other (Hegelian) words – they »struggle for recognition«. *Recognition* – or acknowledgement (*Anerkennung*) – is of course a well-known Hegelian term. In the literature on Hegel, the idea of recognition is one of the most often discussed and interpreted topics.[7] As we know, it is the basis of the very important idea of *ethical life* (*Sittlichkeit*). In this paper I will not attempt to offer another reading of the general role played by the concept of recognition in Hegel's philosophy. Instead I will outline a moral interpretation – an attempt to explain and ground[8] the idea of tolerance in the intersubjective context of morality. As we shall see, Hegelian recognition concerns individuals, but can also be read on a social and moral level.

I will be arguing that the core of the Hegelian conception of recognition can be used to morally ground the idea of recognition as such. This connection of recognition with morality is not new[9]: contemporary interpretations link recognition to the social dimension of tolerance (e. g. Ch. Taylor and N. Fraser), but the context of group moralities and the universal perspective of morality is usually not sufficiently stressed.

The Hegelian idea of recognition

Hegel's conception of recognition has been pointed to as a key moment in the formation of the idea of intersubjectivity.[10] This extensively developed aspect of Hegelian philosophy is outlined in detail the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.[11] It is important to note that the treatment of intersubjectivity in Hegel's thought also includes insight into social structures at the historical level. This is why his classic treat-

6 Cf. for example: H. KRÄMER, *Integrative Ethik*, Frankfurt/M. 1992, W. WELSCH, *Unsere postmoderne Moderne*, Weinheim 1987. See also: ARISTOTLE, *Nichomachean Ethics*, trans. H. Rackham, London 1962 (tolerance as a virtue).

7 Cf. »A Hegel Bibliography«, *University of Sussex Homepage*:
http://www.sussex.ac.uk/Users/sefd0/bib/hegel.htm (accessed September 6, 2008).

8 I use this term in the Kantian sense.

9 In recent ethical literature morality and recognition are *explicitly* linked. See E. TUGENDHAT, *Vorlesungen über Ethik*, Frankfurt/M. 1993.

10 For example: M.J. SIEMEK, »Dwa modele intersubiektywno!ci« [Two models of intersubjectivity], in: Id., *Hegel i filozofia* [Hegel and philosophy], Warsaw 1998, 186.

11 I use Baillie's translation: G.W.F. HEGEL, *The Phenomenology of Mind*, trans. J.B. Baillie, New York 1961.

ment of recognition deals with »lordship and bondage«,[12] figures which have clear historical counterparts in European culture. From this historical perspective human intersubjectivity has its genesis in the »life-and-death struggle« between individuals and the and constraining of one group of people by another. In this light primal relations between individuals were determined by lordship, bondage and their transformations.

It is impossible to present all of the subtle Hegelian refinements of the lordship and bondage dialectic in one short paper. Nor is this necessary: this topic has already been dealt with at length in countless studies. Here it is important merely to look at some general aspects and the main structural elements of Hegelian inter-personal space. Hegel's treatment of human recognition in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* culminates in the following conclusion: the individual believes that self-certainty is possible only if its reality (its existence) is confirmed by another person as authoritative. »Self-consciousness exists in itself and for itself, in that, and by the fact that it exists for another self-consciousness; that is to say, it *is* only by being acknowledged or ›recognized‹«.[13] The situation presented here reveals that two potential subjects have to destroy each other if one of them wants to be dominant with respect to the other. If one of the subjects wants – and *is able* – to exist as recognized (as the »lord« or the »master«) the other must therefore be the recognizing one (the »bondsman« or the »servant«). But each of them needs to be recognized. Thus, in this way two hypothetical subjects, or »self-consciousnesses«, have to contend with each other and in the life and death struggle they affirm (prove) each other. Why do they have to struggle? Hegelian thinking is focused on the individual freedom and right to be free: »it is solely by risking life that freedom is obtained; only thus is demonstrated that the essential nature of self-consciousness is not bare existence, is not the merely the immediate form in which it at first makes its appearance, is not its mere absorption in the expanse of life. Hegel shows that that there is nothing present but that which can be understood as a vanishing moment – that self-consciousness is merely pure self-existence, being-for-self. The individual, who has not staked his life, may, no doubt, be recognized as a person; but he has not attained the truth of this recognition as an independent self-consciousness«.[14] This somewhat dramatic situation should be seen as the genesis of social equality – the equality of willing to be a free person.

Let us first consider the above statements on recognition. Hegel claims that awareness of another person's existence implies assuming a specific attitude in relation to this other. Individual needs and aims (Hegelian »life« and »desire«/*Begierde*) collide with the needs and aims of others. We have here two moments; first, the existence of the other (individual) enables one to realize how one's own needs are in confrontation with the needs of another (even though these lives and needs are ontologically the same). The difference between these two lives, two identities, leads to real self-consciousness (»existence for itself«). The individual »sees its own self in the other«.[15] A second moment is that one individual attains its satisfaction only in another individual – the difference between them causes the freedom of each to be uncertain. The only way to attain certainty is to be recognized by another individual. That is why one subject has to dominate the other subject. The drive of domination is *symmetrical*, so the individuals have to struggle with themselves. In the *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences* Hegel explains this situation by simply naming it »the process of recognition«: »the impulse to show itself as a free self, and to exist as such for the other«.[16] One instance of freedom (one subject) turns out to be

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12 Many scholars have made the point that the other, very popular translation »slave« (probably taken from very well known, influential Kojèvian interpretation) is not an appropriate rendering of Hegel's *Knecht*. See: A. KOJÈVE, *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel. Leçons sur la phénoménologie de l'esprit*, Paris ²1968.

13 G.W.F. HEGEL, *The Phenomenology of Mind*, 178.

14 Ibid., 187.

15 Ibid., 179.

16 *Hegel's Philosophy of Spirit: Part Three of the Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences*, trans. W. Wallace, Oxford 1971, § 430. Cf. also »I cannot be aware of me as myself in another individual, so long as I see in that other an other and an immediate existence: and I am consequently bent upon the

weaker than other instance of freedom (subject): the empirical existence of the subject and its needs are valued as more worthy than its freedom. The second subject does not care about its empirical life – he is concerned only with its freedom. Thus, in the struggle, the first potential subject has to be afraid of its life and as result fears the second subject. A process of recognition is a battle in which one consciousness has to be the servant, that is, has to recognize another (as the master). Thus the first recognition is one-sided. This is an unavoidable moment of inequality – but, as we shall see, is only a moment.

The result of the lordship and bondage dialectic in the *Phenomenology* can be depicted in two ways. The first can be called *logical*, and the second *phenomenological*. The logical form of description relies on the immanent consequence of – to use a Heideggerian term – *the meeting* of two potential subjects. As the subjects exist only in the *plural*, it is necessary that they recognize each other reciprocally: »Each sees the other do the same as itself; each itself does what it demands on the part of the other, and for that reason does what it does, only so far as the other does the same. Action from one side only would be useless, because what is to happen can only be brought about by means of both«.[17] These lines lead to the famous words: subjects »recognize themselves as mutually recognizing one another«.[18] In this way Hegel describes the necessity of *mutual* recognition; this process has to be reached, though at first there exists a relation of inequality. The fact of coexistence with other people, when realized by one subject, requires that he perform actions appropriate to this fact and *should* determine his attitude.

The second way of describing the lordship and bondage dialectic in the *Phenomenology* can be *phenomenological,* and is in fact a further specification of the recognition process. Hegel describes exactly the same structure, but in a controversial historical dimension.[19] The first moment of recognition, as we know, was one-sided acceptance of one's self-certainty. That is why the life and death battle cannot result in the death of one fighting party. »Through death, doubtless, there has arisen the certainty that both did stake their life, and held it lightly both in their own case and in the case of the other; but that is not for those who underwent this struggle. They cancel their consciousness which had its place in this alien element of natural existence«.[20] The fight between consciousnesses cannot end with death of one fighter; the lord without his bondsman is not the lord, and an acknowledged subject requires a witness to the *modus* of his existence. The lord thus depends upon the bondsman – this can be called the beginning of the end of inequality. Primal social relations based on the recognized domination must therefore transform themselves; because it is like the other (it also has its life and needs), the recognizing consciousness necessarily also *intends* be recognized.[21] The master's reign realizes itself through the work (culti-

suppression of this immediacy of his. But in like measure I cannot be recognized as immediate, except so far as I overcome the mere immediacy on my own part, and thus give existence to my freedom. But this immediacy is at the same time the corporeity of self-consciousness, in which as in its sign and tool the latter has its own sense of self, and its being for others, and the means for entering into relation with them«. *Hegel's Philosophy of Spirit: Part Three of the Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences*, § 431. (In this part of the *Encyclopaedia* Hegel deals with the same issues as in the sections on recognition in the *Phenomenology*, but does so in more succinct and theoretical language.)

17 HEGEL, *The Phenomenology of Mind*, 182.
18 Ibid., 184.
19 It is a commonly held view that the Marxian understanding of historical class struggles was influenced by the Hegelian figures of Master and Servant. However, – and astonishingly – it is difficult to find direct confirmation of this opinion in Marx's writings. See for example Marx's preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, ed. M. Dobb, New York 1970 (reprint). For this reason, Arthur concludes that »this view is completely false«. Ch. ARTHUR, »Hegel's Master-Slave Dialectic and a Myth of Marxology«, in: *New Left Review* (1983), 67–75.
20 HEGEL, *The Phenomenology of Mind*, 188.
21 This aspect of Hegelian recognition is very well picked out in the texts of M.J. Siemek. See his »Wolno!" jako zasada !wiata nowoczesnego« [Freedom as a basis of the modern world] in his *Hegel i filozofia*, 80.

vation) of the bondsman; his desire is satisfied by his servant. The master's satisfaction, his independence, is possible thanks to a cultivated subject. Thus: »The truth of the independent consciousness is accordingly the consciousness of the bondsman«.[22] Since the lord's freedom is dependent on the recognition of the slave, it is dependent on the bondsman's products as well. What was considered to be one's freedom thus turns into its *opposite*. The bondsman thus factually is able to realise his power over the lord – since the lord is dependent on recognition. The lord sees that the bondsman is the real lord and that as such he is also a servant – because of his dependence on the bondsman. Hegel shows this structure in the temporal dimension. Consciousness of the bondsman gains its freedom through labour. The work of dependent consciousness is a necessary consequence of the act of one-sided recognition. The work of the servant gives him a weapon, which is a weapon in the effective struggle for recognition: work makes the lord dependent on the bondsman, and he *is thus forced* to recognize the bondsman. One-sided recognition is the first step to reciprocity – to mutual recognition.

Moral dimension of recognition

This structure of mutual recognition from the lordship and bondage dialectic can be used to point out how it is possible to ground tolerance in the context of moralities. Even though this connection is not apparent in Hegel's texts – as we know, Hegel is primarily concerned with *Sittlichkeit,* and morality in the strict sense, in so far as it connected with subjective spirit, is considered rather critically by him – this interpretation is justified because of the paradigmatic character of the figures depicted in the *Phenomenology*. Due to their formality it is possible to apply them to many topics,[23] including intersubjectivity and universal morality.

Struggles for recognition are a real fact in many societies today, and their persistence is a reason why the Hegelian model of mutual recognition, which has been so central to to the renaissance of Hegel's political thought, continues to be relevant. Hegel's theory of recognition reveals, already on the intuitive level, that self-respect or self-esteem are profound demands which can be understood both personally and politically.[24] Legal measures are able to solve political and social problems through the implementation of minimal rules of coexistence (as requirements of »negative freedom«), but recognition is an active attitude, exceeding the dimensions of constitutional law. In this light the transposition of lordship and bondage from the dialectic of self-consciousness to the *objective* political level of the group morality (seen from a sociological viewpoint[25]), gives a normative dimension to Hegelian recognition.

Accordingly, the primal relation between the dominant morality and the moralities of the minorities is the relation in which minorities are under control of the values of the dominant morality. This actually means, that *other and different moralities* are marked by common and public types of values, behaviour, opinions, and lifestyles. This confrontation of what is common with what is not usually gives rise to the situation of the depreciation of identity. It is precisely in this moment that moral struggles for recognition begin. The aim of these struggles is to gain full membership of society. What is needed here is a special kind of *process* (*Bildung*), which is capable of showing that the condition of institutionalized

22 HEGEL, *The Phenomenology of Mind*, 193.
23 This element of Hegelian thought has in fact a multitude of applications and interpretations. The figures of the lord and the bondsman have entered into everyday language as »master and slave«. Contemporary discourse ethicists also use Hegelian mutual recognition as a model of the symmetrical, free, and equal discourse. Cf. P. HEDBERG, »Freedom, Reason and History: The Hegelian Heritage in Gadamer and Habermas«, in: *Parabel* VI/1 (2003), 19–43.
24 A. HONNETH, *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, trans. J. Anderson, Cambridge 1996.
25 Morality was already interesting sociologically for E. Durkheim. In the 20th century the sociology of morality became a separate discipline. See M. OSSOWSKA, *Socjologia moralno!ci: zarys zagadnie"* [The sociology of morality: An outline of its problems], Warsaw 1963.

moral subordination is not the condition of reciprocity, cooperation and discourse.[26] The condition of struggle forces reciprocity as in the Hegelian structure. However, Hegel's model allows to us interpret the interpersonal symmetry as a factual, real matrix of intersubjectivity, and thus something that makes undistorted communication as well as social conflict possible.[27] A moral reading of the lordship and bondage dialectic therefore shows us the normative potential of recognition in relation to tolerance. This interpretation has an important philosophical reason. Legal order without morality is not possible (law depends on morality – and morality is conditioned by legality), thus the relation between morality and law should be considered in a universal normative horizon.

Let us recall a line from the *Declaration of Principles on Tolerance*: »Tolerance is, above all, an active attitude prompted by recognition of the universal human rights and fundamental freedoms of others«. In the moral context, the Hegelian viewpoint clearly shows that recognition can be understood as tolerance itself: tolerance thus gains a philosophical foundation. What is very important here is the conclusion that the method applied to solving the conflicts of group moralities is also a moral method: as the *Declaration* says – tolerance is our (moral and legal) duty. The moral horizon of mutual recognition constitutes itself through the versatility of the rule of tolerance. *To recognize one subject* and simultaneously *to be recognized* – this relation is defined as the reciprocal respect of freedom. The moral relevance of this phenomenon is contained in the fact that *my* freedom is always *our* freedom. And this is because the moral interpretation of the act of recognition has its own grounding in intersubjectivity.[28] On the level of group morality the idea of recognition has a more distinct moral significance. Diverse evaluative schemes in each of the particular societies can lead to tension and conflicts, and in light of this fact the idea of *recognition as tolerance* may be seen as a guarantor of social peace. For if recognition is understood normatively, as a requirement of reciprocity, tolerance has moral value and therefore transgresses (and goes beyond) group morality.

In the 18th Century Voltaire grounded tolerance in the (Christian) idea of brotherhood.[29] The idea of brotherhood gave rise to a concept of tolerance centred on relationships inside groups and smaller societies, rather than on one that addresses the moral challenges of global politics. Following Hegel, however, we should be prepared to say: »The Truth is the Whole/*Das Wahre ist das Ganze*«.[30] The idea of tolerance, based on the Hegelian concept of recognition, but interpreted morally, is particularly appropriate to intersocial relationships, because it discloses moral needs in a global dimension, that is to say: morality from a universal perspective.

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26 Cf. N. FRASER, »Rethinking recognition«, in: *New Left Review* 3 (2000), 107–120. What is interesting here is that defenders of the idea of social equality often the avoid Hegelian model of recognition because implies struggle and the inequality of individuals.
27 As in »liberal« formal interpretations of Kojève and Siemek – in opposition to the »communitarian« or ethical/evaluative interpretations (e. g., Charles Taylor).
28 This statement may be justified on the basis of post-Kantian transcendentalism (especially of the Fichtean kind). See also: KRÄMER, *Integrative Ethik*.
29 VOLTAIRE, *Treatise on tolerance*.
30 G.W.F. HEGEL, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, Hamburg, 1988, 15.