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The social idea in liberal democracy

A study of legitimation and grounding, together with an attempt to adapt the dialectical method in a cosmopolitan aspect

ABSTRACT

The general goal of the dissertation

The main subject of the dissertation is grounding¹ of the 'social idea'², assuming that liberal democracy is a system of power, that enable its implementation. The phrase 'social idea' is used deliberately in the title of the work to emphasize that the research method used is strictly philosophical in nature and does not fall within the competence of social sciences. However, completely abstracting from social science is not possible, primarily because the issue of grounding is inextricably linked to the problem of legitimation³ of the social and political order. The problem of legitimation is impossible to avoid, but taken in itself it is not constitutive of the grounding of the social idea⁴. Legitimation is therefore critically examined here as *the ratio cognoscendi* of liberal democracy, and grounding as *the ratio essendi* of the social idea. The issue of

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- 1 I decided to use the word 'grounding' (pol. *Uzasadnienie*) in this translation because the term 'justification' would be misleading. 'Justification' would suggest that my philosophical research consists solely of empirical generalizations. The point here is not that philosophy should be a commentary on empirical analyses, but that it should provide a *synthesis* in the Kantian sense of the word. 'Grounding' here means expressing apriorical 'conditions of possibility' (Kantian '*Bedingungen ... der Möglichkeit*'; see footnote on next page) for what does not necessarily exist in reality.
 - 2 The English language cannot express the difference between an 'idea' as a 'complex perception' and an idea in Kantian or Hegelian sense. This dissertation is about an 'idea' in the latter sense.
 - 3 '*Legitimität*.' See: Max Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, b. I, k. III, §1.
 - 4 However, in historical and empirical considerations it is what emerges first.

grounding is treated here in a similar way to Kant's *Grounding of the Metaphysics of Morals*, i.e. as a critique of what constitutes social issues and what, in consequence, constitutes the 'conditions of possibility'⁵ of a free society.

The aim of a critical analysis of the determining ground (*Bestimmungsgrund*) for the social idea is to prepare the ground for an apology and revitalization of Hegel's dialectical method. This results from the assumption that in the modern world, social and political orders can no longer refer to the concept of the nation state. Today's political order is, *de facto*, fundamentally shaped by international institutions.⁶ These institutions shape the legal order not only in a positive sense, but above all in a moral sense. Leaving this sphere without any reflection leads to what Kant found in the sphere of epistemology before waking up from his "dogmatic slumber."

The dissertation is guided by the assumption that it is possible to deduce (i. e. to ground) the moral law not only at the socio-political level, but also in the cosmopolitan aspect. Moreover, if such a deduction is possible, it means that it is also necessary. It was assumed that such a deduction could only be made dialectically, specifically by adapting the Hegelian method. Such adaptation, of course, requires dealing with the internal limitations and errors of Hegel's philosophy, but also refuting unjust accusations leveled against it.

Introduction

The work is preceded by an introduction in which terminological and methodological issues are explained, including, above all, the difference and relationship between the issue of

5 'Bedingungen ... der Möglichkeit der Erfahrung.' See: Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B 126 [AA III 105].

6 It is about institutions in a broad sense, i.e. not only specific organizations, but, for example, the way of distributing goods and the flow of capital.

grounding and the issue of legitimation. The importance of the dialectical method for further considerations is also signaled. There is also provided a preliminary critique of the logical consequences of avoiding dialectics, which lead to the revival of dogmatic metaphysics in the social sciences, as well as practical consequences in social and political life. There is also a separate subchapter explaining why the work talks about a ‘social idea’ and not simply about ‘society’ or ‘social sphere’. The subject and purpose of the research are presented here, which is related to the initial explication of the dialectical method.

The difference between classical liberalism and neoliberalism is also explained here. Therefore, an answer is given why the considerations do not refer *in extenso* to the “classics” of contemporary democratic theory, i.e., among others: John Rawls, Robert Nozick and Jürgen Habermas⁷. It is impossible to abstract from the thoughts of these authors, but their goal was not to provide a moral grounding⁸ of the social idea in the sense of this dissertation. These authors focus primarily on procedural issues, which means that the moral aspect of their considerations is contaminated by empirical issues or methodological fixation.

Chapter I. The dialectic of neoliberalism

The first main chapter considers two concepts of socio-political philosophy. The choice falls on the works of Karl Popper and Francis Fukuyama primarily because these authors refer in some way to idealistic philosophy, and in particular to the philosophy of Hegel. Popper generally negatively assesses idealism, while Fukuyama makes an apology for some elements of the Hegelian system. However, both Popper and Fukuyama

7 The exception here is Habermas, to whom a large part of the last chapter is devoted.

8 They consider rather ‘justification’ than ‘grounding’.

make too far-reaching manipulations in trying to discredit (Popper) or revitalize (Fukuyama) idealistic thought. Both Popper and Fukuyama are, in fact, idealists, but in a naïve sense. Popper idealizes individualism, while Fukuyama idealizes economic competition. However, idealistic abuses look different in these two authors. Popper fights against an imaginary enemy he labels “historicism.” In contrary, Fukuyama is emphasizing the historiosophical aspect of Hegel's philosophy, but he reduces it to economic issues, and thereby destroys the coherence of the dialectical method. Popper's mistake is that he falls into nominalism, which makes society something - literally - abstract. Fukuyama, however, distorts the thesis about the logical ‘end of history’ into an empirical economic theory that is unsuitable as a grounding for a social idea.

Despite the above-mentioned shortcomings, both authors aspire to ground the social order in some way. However, both of them try in different ways to escape from idealism, towards which their considerations tend anyway. Thus, Popper and Fukuyama fall into dogmatic metaphysics. The explication of these two concepts is intended to illuminate the paradigmatic situation of social philosophy, which conceptually returns to the pre-critical period. The lack of criticism means that social science and philosophy are dominated by ‘liberal gnosis’, which petrifies society and politics. The problem of this gnosis would require discussion in a separate work, therefore in this chapter it will only be highlighted as a separate subchapter.

Chapter II. *Status quo*

Liberalist gnosis has economic, social and political consequences. Such consequences are the subject of considerations in the third chapter. However, the considerations contained here go beyond sociological and economic descriptions, because their goal is not only to explain phenomena, but to search for

rational elements. This procedure is intended to prepare the material for dialectical synthesis by presenting moments of *specificity*⁹ - in accordance with the way in which Hegel carried out his dialectical deductions.

The chapter is divided into four parts. First part exposes the obscure metaphysics of neoliberal economic system. The axis of analysis here is the concept of “technological rationality” coined by Herbert Marcuse. This concept is adapted to more contemporary considerations (i.a. those of Jean Baudrillard, Mark Fisher and Peter Sloterdijk). An important part of these “debunking” analyzes are also John K. Galbraith's comments on the dualistic nature of the neoliberal economy. It turns out that metaphysics, which seemed to be “thrown out through the door” comes back out the window, which is visible even at the level of purely economic analyses. However, the task of philosophy is to transcend the horizon of view of the specific sciences, because they themselves are unable to propose a remedy in the form of logically grounded normative theses.

The second part highlights the effects of the “afterlife” of neoliberal metaphysics. They manifest themselves primarily as the loss of political will and the inability to identify moral evil and the response to it, which - contrary to the obsession of libertarian fundamentalists¹⁰ - should be moral good. The solution to this state of affairs cannot be strictly scientific improvement of administration techniques, because the growth of administration replaces politics, which only fuels the spiral of evil. The description of the reduction of political power to administration made here is based on Baudrillard's concept of “hyper-reality”.

The third part develops the problem of absorbing political power by the process of economization of politics, i.e. transfer-

9 ‘Bestimmtheit.’ See: Hegel, *Science of Logic*, vol. 1, b. 1.

10 An allusion to the slogan of Ronald Reagan, who claimed that the worst thing you can hear from a government representative is the phrase: “I'm here to help.”

ring models of economic process management to the political field. The first section of this part discusses the Rational Choice Theory (RCT) in its original formulation made by Kenneth Arrow and its later form developed by James M. Buchanan and Gordon Tullock. Criticism of this theory by Brian Barry and Ian Shapiro will also be presented. Section two of part three will present the specific economic effects of several other neoliberal tenets in addition to RCT. One of them is Coase's social cost theorem, which provides a scientific justification¹¹ for the law of the stronger. The third section, in addition to the economic consequences, will also present the political and moral effects on the example of reforms ordered by Milton Friedman's students in Chile during the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet.

The fourth part is the most extensive, discussing the main trends of the neoliberal response to systemic errors resulting from the economization of politics. In short, this reaction looks like putting out a fire with gasoline. The analysis of the neoliberal dogmas from which this reaction draws its *raison d'être* is the starting point for the critique of pure democracy. Apart from the negative side, this analysis also contains a positive moment that can be used in a dialectical synthesis.

Chapter III. Deduction of the social idea

Before a dialectical synthesis is possible, there will be presented several selected philosophical and political ideas. Those ideas have been chosen, because they aspired to a logical grounding of social idea. They will be presented in order of increasing logical perfection rather than chronological priority. It begins with the modern concept of Robert P. Wolff, who deduces the social sphere *expressis verbis* in the Kantian sense of the word. Then the thought of James Wilson is discussed, who

11 Here in the exact meaning of 'justification', not 'grounding'.

was not only the founding father of the USA, but also the most philosophically competent man among his great companions. Wilson makes a deduction of a state sovereignty that goes much further than the mere deduction of society. Wilson's deduction has a very Kantian character, as it links social existence with the right to political self-determination. Next, Fichte's deduction of representative power will be discussed, as well as other concepts that both strengthen and undermine it. Finally, Hegel's dialectical concept will be discussed.

The disadvantages of each of the discussed concepts will also be presented. For Wolff, this is a descent into psychologism. Wilson's approach is insufficient systematicity and failure in the arena of real politics. Fichte undermined his system by falling into nationalism bordering on proto-fascism. Of this entire group, the most promising seems to be Hegel's system, whose significant flaws can be removed and the unimportant ones explained or omitted.

Chapter IV. Dialectic in the cosmopolitan aspect

In the last main chapter, an attempt is made to correct the internal errors of Hegel's dialectical method in order to be able to transfer it to the arena of international relations. Today, the existence of social idea has gone way beyond national politics, i.e. in human rights. In a cosmopolitan aspect, these rights cannot be grounded on the basis of some archaic forms¹². On the other hand, we cannot count on human rights to emerge spontaneously as an unintended consequence of globalized capitalism. An ideological or even ideal effort is necessary here. Hegel's system in its cosmopolitan aspect would therefore have

12 For example, Islamic fundamentalism, Russian neo-traditionalism, or Chinese neo-Confucianism. The same can be said about the revival of *laissez-faire* in populist politics (e.g. in both Americas), as it ultimately leads to the legitimization of power in its traditional form.

to ground the right of world citizenship, i.e. a form of social existence that derives its grounding not from what is actual, but from what is ideal.

At this point, we cannot ignore Jürgen Habermas's attempt to ground world citizenship. Habermas's theory seems to avoid problems of empirical views, but also programmatically deprecates Hegel's dialectical speculations. However, the analysis of Habermas's theory shows that it ultimately does not live up to the hopes placed in it. Moreover, the latest political events¹³ expose not only the weakness of Habermas's position, but also the fact that his theory may contribute to the self-destruction of the Enlightenment foundations of Western civilization. Habermas's discourse theory can be used to relativize the importance of the rational foundations of international law in favor of authoritarian tendencies.

Ultimately, it turns out that it is impossible to escape from dialectics, because it imposes itself on all of humanity in a very “tangible” form, which is primarily the nuclear doctrine of *Mutual Assured Destruction*. Nuclear weapons literally realize Hegel's *totality* by the very fact that the concept of ‘atomic war’ sublates¹⁴ the moment of determinateness¹⁵ and infinity contained in the basic concept of war. Therefore, war is no longer – as Hegel stated in *Grounding of the Philosophy of Law*¹⁶ – the only *praetor* in international relations. Nuclear weapons have the potential to destroy all of humanity, but that is exactly the reason why they are not allowed to be used. Therefore the concept of nuclear war overcomes the most serious obstacle of Hegel's system of objective spirit. Nuclear

13 First of all, Russia's attack on Ukraine.

14 English verb ‘to sublate’ refers to German ‘*aufheben*’, i.e. as enduring and destroying at the same time. See: Hegel, *Science of Logic*, trans. by George di Giovanni, (Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 81-82 (especially translator note at page lxvii).

15 Hegel's *Bestimmtheit*.

16 See § 333 (remark).

“war” is a war that cannot break out precisely because it would be totally “effective” (even though no one would win). The power of nuclear weapons is hyper-real and this is what overcomes the possibility of their real use. A by-product of this “nuclear dialectic” is that it forces nuclear weapons disposers to reason morally, not just pragmatically¹⁷. Thanks to this, the international peace does not result from accidental moral premises, but from dialectical necessity in the cosmopolitan aspect.

End

The threat of nuclear *Armageddon* does not have to last forever. However, it may be *a moment* that humanity can and therefore must overcome (*aufheben*). However, this will require not only accidental geopolitical factors, but above all action based on philosophical ideas. The thesis of the ending is that the history of humanity slowed down or regressed not because of an excess of ideas, but because of the “deficiency of theory”, that is, because of an inadequate conscious of freedom. Events in which such conscious was lacking are referred to here as “constitutional moments”. The conclusion provides examples of such moments and expresses the expectation that the political consciousness, that will have to face such moments in the future, must be shaped dialectically.

17 It is forgotten that the mere possession of nuclear weapons is a threat that shapes not only relations with other countries, but also internal politics. I also draw attention to the threat of proliferation, which paradoxically limits power more in authoritarian countries than in free democracies.