
DEBORDERING OF THE BORDER AND ITS LIMIT

R o k S v e t l i č

Introduction

In this article, the phenomena of the debordering of borders will be addressed. An illustrative example of the debordering of the borders is the European Union. Without exaggeration it can be said that we achieved a better world by this process. We cannot fail to mention the possibilities offered to many individuals, which are to move from one country to another, to gain economic benefits, and, finally, the security consequences on several levels. However, we must consider that this process has its limits. In posing the question whether debordering can become a political (or ethical) program, the answer must be negative. It will be shown that the border is an autonomous phenomenon that resists arbitrary manipulation.

The border is not a matter of convention. The only possible approach to it is to respect the border as an autonomous entity. However, we need to remain open to immanent processes of the transformation of borders that enables the phenomena of debordering. According to Kant's thesis about "perpetual peace", the world will be progressively more and more regulated by the law, i.e. by the reason. If he is right, this is good news for the debordering process. But we must not push it over the immanent possibility: we must respect the limits of debordering.

In this paper, two mistakes of arbitrary manipulation of borders will be analysed. The first one is the attempt to *transfer the border in the blockade*, in the absolute sealed boundary. As an example, the Berlin wall can be mentioned or any other totalitarian states border. The second mistake is, however, its mirror-picture: *the project of violent erosion of the border*. It emerges as a naïve application of cosmopolitan ideas in the politics, and is recently present in the first place as an irrational

migrant-policy that is, in its extreme form, described by the “open the borders” acclamation. The goal of this article is to demonstrate that these two mistakes immanently produce a mechanism that leads to their failure.

We will focus also on the implication of violent manipulation with the border on the capability of the individual to recognize itself as a citizen of concrete state. This capability is a “glue” of each society, without which the state becomes unstable or even dissolves itself. It will be shown that the politics is not free to choose the entity in which an individual will recognize himself. Unfortunately, the most prized concept of a cosmopolitan perspective, the “mankind” as such, is not (yet) able to combine the people in recognized society. On that ground, the mankind is not a political concept and the cosmopolitan values, especially human rights, must be implemented in (politically organized) life in other ways. One of the most important places in that respect is precisely the regime on the border.

From the philosophical point of view, the border represents a very interesting concept. It is the point where two opposite elements come together: continuity and discontinuity, connection and separation etc. This tension is the source of the two abovementioned mistakes that will be analysed in this article. The former isolates the discontinuity and demands to seal the borders hermetically. The latter isolates the discontinuity and demands to abolish the border. The task of the philosophy is, however, to demonstrate that these two elements are connected in immanent manner. No external intervention is needed to hold them together. The continuity and the discontinuity are two sides of the same coin.

Border as the Blockade

We will start with discussing the first mistake, with an attempt to treat the border as the blockade. The starting point of this approach is the assumption that the border can represent absolute negation of some entity, e.g. of the state. It is presupposed that total emptiness lies beyond it, metaphorically said, the end of the world. It should be emphasized that this attitude is the violation of the concept of border

as such. It is not about the moral questionability of closing a certain state behind the wall; this attempt ignores the conceptual dynamic of the border and triggers the process that sooner or later dissolves such a manipulation of the border.

To demonstrate the internal dynamic of the concept of border, we will refer to Hegel's work *Science of Logic*. We could use numerous places in Hegel's opus to illustrate the immanent connection of two contradicting elements, since the program-sentence of his philosophy is *contradictio est regula veri*. However, we refer to the two chapters in the first book of *Science of Logic* as the most suitable ones to describe the mechanism of the border. In the chapter titled "*Finitude*" Hegel discusses the notion of the limit, in the chapter titled "*The One and the many*" the mutual relationship between separation and connection is thematised.

In the former chapter, where the transition from finitude to infinity occurs, Hegel investigates the dialectic between "something" and "other". We can take, as an example, the table and the chair. Our common sense suggests that these two entities are totally separated from each other, and that the limit between them keeps the determination of the first one totally independent from the determination of the second one. The investigation of the limit teaches us that this is not the case. The "something" is in fact stretching itself over the limit into the "other". The "other" is in this way a part of the determination of "something", in negated way: a necessary part of the notion of table is that it is *not* a chair, *not* a book, *not* a computer etc. Traditional metaphysics teaches *omnis determination est negatio*.

That alters common sense understanding of the limit as a simple cutting-off of "something" from the "other". Firstly, it can be said that "something", due to the limit, is (exists) and is not:

"Something, as an immediate existence, is therefore the limit with respect to another something; but it has this limit in it and is something through the mediation of that limit, which is just as much its non-being. The limit is the mediation in virtue of which something and other each both is and is not."¹

¹ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Science of Logic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 118.

Secondly, the limit is the manifestation of contradictory nature of “something” as finite and in the same time infinite (i.e. stretching over itself) entity. If we say that the limit limits “something”, we must presuppose that the “something” is already over it: “In order for the limit that is in every something to be a restriction, the something must at the same time transcend it in itself – must refer to it from within as to a non-existent.”² Namely, this is the condition of the possibility of being limited.

This contradictory nature of “something” is manifested in the “unrest”³ on the border that drives the “something” over self. That’s why Hegel describes the limit also as *das Sollen*, as a concept that at the same time describes the limitation and also being over the limitation. If we imagine the person in prison, and claim that his freedom is limited, that means *eo ipso* that he is simultaneously already out of prison: with his longing, expectations, imagination. If he was not (by his belonging and longing) over the limitation, his freedom by imprisonment would not be limited.

Now we can describe the mistake of the attempt to treat the border as the blockade. This attempt ignores the fact that “something” unavoidably consists of the moment of infinity. That is why the relationship between “something”, the limit and the “other” includes two levels and not only one. From the point of view of “something”, the limit represents its first negation, the “other”, however, its second negation: “This relation is the external appearance of the fact that limit is a simple negation or the first negation, whereas the other is, at the same time, the negation of the negation, the in-itselfness of the something.”⁴ The second negation – as negation of the negation – is the negation of “something’s” limitation, i.e. the stretching over its own finiteness. The border as the blockade tries to approach the “something” only by first negation. It attempts to control the “unrest” on the border by force: by police or military surveillance, by brutal regime.

² Ibid., 121.

³ “The other determination is the unrest of the something in its limit in which it is immanent, the contradiction that propels it beyond itself.” Ibid., 119.

⁴ Ibid.

But this strategy, since it ignores the very concept of the “something”, actually amplifies the “unrest”, the tension on the border. It produces a false illusion that beyond it, there is an unlimited freedom, the possibility that the unrest can finally be *absolutely* reconciled. This is the consequence of the blockade which deceives the citizens of closed countries, it delivers the impression that the place over the limit is an abstract emptiness that enables unlimited possibilities of fulfilment. In fact, over the border there is just another ordinary state (this is the level of the second negation) with its problems, and then another state and so on. In this way, the blockade unavoidably creates immense pressure of the abstract *Sollen* on the boundary that sooner or later penetrates the blockade.

We can find a similar message in the latter abovementioned chapter of *Science of Logic* where Hegel discusses the unavoidable failure of all attempts that aim to produce absolutely “sterile” area by isolation from the “other”:

“Driven to the extreme of the one as being-for-itself, self-subsistence is an abstract, formal self-subsistence that destroys itself. It is the ultimate, the most stubborn error, one which takes itself as the ultimate truth, whether it assumes the more concrete form of abstract freedom, of pure “I,” and, further still, of evil. It is the freedom which so misconceives itself as to place its essence in this abstraction, and, in thus shutting itself up within itself, flatters itself that it attains itself in all purity. This self-subsistence, to determine it further, is the error of considering its own essence negatively and of relating itself to it negatively. It is, thus, a negative relating to itself which, while wanting to gain its own being, destroys it – and this, his doing, is only the manifestation of the nullity of the doing. Reconciliation is the recognition that that towards which the negative relating is directed is rather its essence, and this is only in the desisting from the negativity of its being-for-itself rather than in holding fast to it.”⁵

This was the analysis of the first mistake discussed herein, which was carried out on the logical level. Many illustrative examples are, however, also in Hegel’s works where he investigates the dialectics of spirit. In paragraph 163 of *Elements of Philosophy of Right* he writes about celibacy

⁵ Ibid., 145.

that incarnates a similar mistake as was the attempt to seal the border. Human being, according to a traditional definition as *animal rationale*, is composed of two parts, rational (or spiritual) one, and affectional (or sexual) one. The spiritual part is “something” that is in relation with the “other”, with sexual part of a human being. As we have seen, these two moments are immanently connected: the “something” is unavoidably determined by the “other”. This implicates that the spiritual part is not “pure” (i.e. absolutely separated), it is already “infected” on the notional level by sexuality that is in relation with it.

The Church has decided to carry out the measure to keep the spiritual part uncontaminated and has introduced celibacy. Celibacy is the Berlin-wall that should guarantee an aseptic space, secure of sexual passions. The effect of this attempt is precisely the opposite. Hegel writes: “It is a further abstraction if the divine and substantial is separated from its existence in such a way that feeling and the consciousness of spiritual unity are categorized [*fixiert*] as what is falsely called Platonic love. This separation is associated with the monastic attitude which defines the moment of natural life [*Lebendigkeit*] as utterly negative and, by this very separation, endows it with infinite importance in itself.”⁶ This remark well refers also to the political comprehension of the world. It is a common strategy of all radical political projects that, in an eschatological manner, attempt to build up an entirely new world, and create an order that should be *absolutely* different from the old one. This is the origin of fanatical regime on all borders of totalitarian states – the Berlin wall was, for example, called the *anti-fascist* wall that tried to hermetically close the country from the influences that would infect the social experiment with old disease.

The only possible solution is to respect the notion of the border, to recognize the unavoidable exchange between these two moments. We can repeat the quotation: “Reconciliation is the recognition that that towards which the negative relating is directed is rather its essence, and this is only in the desisting from the negativity of its being-for-itself

⁶ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), par. 163.

rather than in holding fast to it.”⁷ Of course, the passions – if we turn back to celibacy – must be subject to the reason. But to achieve this, the passions must be cultivated, and not, however, killed off. Otherwise the subjected moment gets amplified power, demonic appeal, that which is not on the level that it deserves the within realm of the spirit. To harmonize these two moments, the simple institute, known through the whole human history is enough: the marriage.

The consequences of an attempt to violently separate the entities that are internally connected, the consequence of transforming the border into the blockade, is the erosion of the state. The citizens are not able to recognize themselves in such a concept of the state. The regime on the border was one of the most important reasons for the collapse of the Eastern Bloc, including Yugoslavia.

Dissolution of the Border

The previously discussed mistake was the attempt to seal the border hermetically. The mistake that will be discussed now is, however, its mirror-picture. If cosmopolitan ideas are transferred in a political reality in an unmediated way, the borders slowly lose their tonus and cease to determinate “something”, i.e. concrete state. This approach is in *ultima linea* illustrated by the idealistic acclamation: “open the borders”, the most often, however, it is present as an irresponsible migrant-policy. Similarly, this mistake immanently produces its own collapse, but the motive for this distortion of the border is a different one. The main goal for sealing the border was the attempt to produce politically sterile space that should enable the realization of an eschatological project. Previously, it was all about the naïve attempt of a self-affirmation. Now, however, the motive is the opposite one, it is about the naïve attempt of a self-negation. It is carried out in the medium of *guilt* that concerns (our own) particularity, which should be abolished in order to enter a universal horizon of existence. Opening the border is meant as a gesture of a self-universalization. This must be further elaborated on.

⁷ Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, 145.

The guilt of particularity is not a moral guilt, referred to certain acts. It concerns the incapability of the subject – the individual person or (western) culture – to reconcile with his / its own existence. It seeks to abandon (his or its own) particularity, not by cultivating but by annihilating it, in order to move on to a “higher” level of existence. This sentiment is the remnant of Christianity that was smuggled in the modern and *prima facie* secular political culture. Cartesian turn and Enlightenment that have developed undiscussed right of particularity should remove the sentiment of guilt from our understanding of coexistence. The right of particularity is the principle of western comprehension of the world which rests on an autonomous individual. Also, the state was defined by this principle, through the social contract. The state has no independent reality, inherited from the history of the nation or deduced from our “social nature”, it is the product of our will and was created exclusively in order to serve our interests.

This secular principle – although it seems to dominate our world – in certain situations collapses instantly. It is about the situations that concern the distinction between “us” to “them”, between the West and the Third world. In these situations, the Christian concept of guilt triggers the process of inhibition of an entire part of a legal system: from the penal law to the regulation of migration. This attitude is often misinterpreted as a precious moral approach to the migration. As we will see, this is not a moral attitude at all, on contrary, it is the complete dissolution of moral judgment, and therefore, an irresponsible attitude. To illustrate its hidden Christian background we can quote a few famous passages from the Gospels: “Don’t condemn others, and God won’t condemn you.”⁸ “When someone slaps your right cheek, turn and let that person slap your other cheek.”⁹ “But I tell you to love your enemies and pray for anyone who mistreats you.”¹⁰ “If any of you have never sinned, then go ahead and throw the first stone at her!”¹¹

⁸ Mt. 7:1; For the references to the Bible the following version is used: *Biblija.net: The Bible on Internet*, accessed November 28, 2016, <http://www.biblija.net/biblija.cgi?l=en>.

⁹ Mt 5: 39.

¹⁰ Mt 5:44.

¹¹ Jn 8:7.

This is the existential sentiment that is capable to inhibit entire legal system when the distinction between “we” and “them” enters the discourse, i.e. to inhibit the legal system regulating the migrations. It emerges in sentences like these: “Who are we to set the rules in this country?” “We have colonized the world, so we have no moral right to condemn the illegal migrants!” “It is true that some migrants commit a severe crime, but Europeans commit crimes to!” The similarity with the Gospels’ imperatives is obvious. In both cases the very right of *any* moral judgment is attacked, since the self-negation as the subject of moral judgment is demanded. This is a naïve attempt to negate our own particularity, as well is naïve the expectation that this should automatically guarantee the entrance on a higher, universal level of existence. Entrance into the cosmopolitan perspective.

Highly important is, however, to realize that this is not a moral attitude. On contrary, it is the end of a moral judgment as such. Moral attitude is replaced by abstract and blind “love” to everyone, with naïve “humanity” and “solidarity” if modern language is used. This is a vulgar way of confronting the challenge of our existence, of our particularity: active attitude is replaced by passivity, responsibility by sentiment of guilt, judgment by blind hospitality. It is a sign of spiritual weakness and is nothing but the reaction on the incapability to accept the being of the entity with its own characteristic. That means being “something”, having the borders. In the case of migrations, being the Western (spiritual, legal, political, cultural etc.) world.

This attitude is immoral to the migrants and amoral to our self. One of the formulations of Kant’s categorical imperative demands: “Act so that you use humanity, as much in your own person as in the person of every other, always at the same time as end and never merely as means.”¹² What is often overlooked in this sentence is that the categorical duty is focused also on our “*own person*”. According to Enlightenment’s morality, the individual has the duties also to himself. It is not only “the other” who we can mistreat; we can become also the victim ourselves. Is it moral to do so if we abandon ourselves as subject

¹² Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysic of Morals* (New Haven and London: Yale University press, 2002), 29.

to moral judgment, interests, identity, will, and replace it by the sentiment of (planetary) guilt (of the West)?

The only possible solution, however, is to find the balance between human rights (as a cosmopolitan concept), and the fact that political life is organized through the phenomena of particular states. In the case of the migration: the protection of human rights of the refugees must be rigorously demanded, what can be, however, carried out only *by* and *within* concrete state; and not by the negation of the existence of the state(s), i.e. by dissolution of the borders. These are complex questions that need to be further addressed. The goal of this article is, however, to show that arbitrary manipulation with the border – on reason of sentiment guilt or any other – produces its own failure.

The borders as autonomous phenomena resist to both violent manipulations: to attempt to seal it hermetically, and to attempt to dissolve it. The difference between “something” and the “other” does not disappear just by arbitrary opening of the borders. On contrary, a new border is put up immediately. But this border is a pathological, a private one, and highly uncontrollable. The author that we will cite to demonstrate this mechanism is Carl Schmitt. In *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy* he criticizes the cosmopolitan concept of equality, according to which “every adult person, simply as a person, should *eo ipso* be politically equal to every other person.”¹³ To put it differently, it is about the idea that there should be no “borders” between human being at all. According to Schmitt, the cosmopolitan concept of equality is just an abstract concept than can never get any political significance. The equality must – and in fact always does – rest on some “substance” (national, cultural, spiritual, professional etc.) that is differentiated from another one. This, and only this, is politically relevant equality.

If cosmopolitan ideas become a political agenda, the consequences are, maintains Schmitt, twofold:

“Where a state wants to establish general human equality in the political sphere without the concern for national or some other sort of homogeneity, then it cannot escape the consequence that political equality will be devalued

¹³ Carl Schmitt, *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1985), 9.

to the extent that it approximates absolute human equality. (...) Substantive inequalities would in no way disappear from the world and the state; they would shift into another sphere, perhaps separated from the political and concentrated in the economic, leaving this area to take on a new, disproportionately decisive influence.”¹⁴

A sad confirmation of these two warnings is the phenomena of ghettos that have emerged in several European cities. The migration policy has opened the borders to the extent that such a number of people has entered the EU that they were not able to integrate in the dynamic of the western way of life. It is obvious that the gesture of opening borders – which has not respected the difference between “something” and “other” – did not succeed. On the contrary, it has produced an unexpected pathological border that separates the ghetto from the vital society and condemns the people living in them to undignified life:

“Wherever an indifferent concept of equality, without the necessary correlate of inequality, actually takes hold of an area of human life, then this area loses its substance and is overshadowed by another sphere in which inequality then comes into play with ruthless power.”¹⁵

Respecting the Border

The Cartesian tradition is in the heart of our spiritual tradition. It has shaped the secular account of the coexistence, it gave us the right to the particularity, and it enabled the enlightenment. But it has also inflicted on us the burden that the mankind previously had not been aware of: the idea that the world must be created by the man’s act. This is the source of radical politics that emerges in modernity, and the source of the attempt to reshape the world in a different extent – the most radical project is the idea of (Marxist or fascist) revolution. It is an important insight of a different author that has indicated the limitation of such attempts. We need to stress the writing of Martin Heidegger, his famous sentence about a human being as a “herdsman” of the Being:

¹⁴ Ibid., 12.

¹⁵ Ibid.

“One day we shall learn to think our exhausted word for truth in terms of the preserve; to experience truth as the preservation of Being; and to understand that, as presencing, Being belongs to this preservation. As a protection of Being, preservation belongs to the herdsman, who has so little to do with bucolic idylls and Nature mysticism that he can be the herdsman of Being only if he continues to hold the place of nothingness. Both are the same. Man can do both only within the openness of Da-sein.”¹⁶

A man can become the master of a being (*das Seiende*) but never of the Being (*das Sein*). It is, however, the Being that determinates the way *how* the world exists. The revolutionary attempt to change the horizon where the phenomena get their meaning cannot succeed.

It is essential to accept that “something” exists. As mentioned above, it is a secondary question how to define this “something”. We can name it, in the case of borders between the states, as ethical substance, specific culture, *forma mentis*, habits, or in any other way. Only one thing is important: we must respect the right of these phenomena to their existence, which is impossible without respecting the border between them. It is about the most basic ethical attitude toward the world, called allow-to-be(ing) (*Sein-lassen*). This is not the appeal to passivity, on contrary, it presupposes an awaken openness to the prose of the Being. Awaken openness is the only way how to get the hints for further steps of debordering of the borders. The borders can be debordered only if we remain open to the immanent processes within them. If we try to deborder them violently, these hints will be misheard, and the manipulation will – as shown above – produce its own failure.

We can conclude this article with the following summarization: the border is not the euphemism for the selfishness, exclusion, proto-fascism, Eurocentrism, xenophobia etc. It is the only phenomenon that enables the cultivation of the relationship between (individual and collective) subjects. It is live and autonomous phenomena that reconcile the finitude and the infinity of “something”: it is the place where “something” spontaneously overcomes the “other” and so on. The border is not the negation of cosmopolitan ideas, on contrary; it is a privileged place which can serve human beings.

¹⁶ Martin Heidegger, *Discourse on Thinking* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1966), 81.

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