DIALECTICS AS DE-/RELINKING:

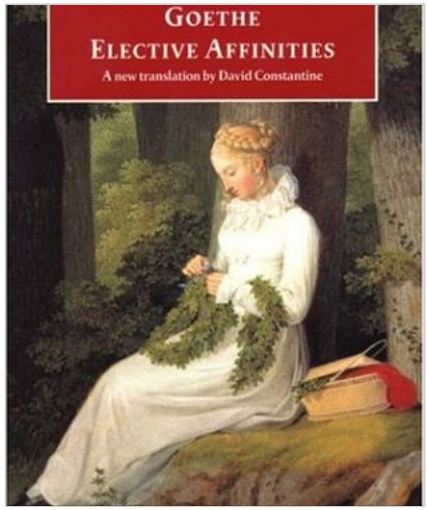
RELATIONALITY, COLLECTIVE SELF-DETERMINATION, AND THE NEGATIVE UTOPIA OF ABSOLUTE KNOWLEDGE.

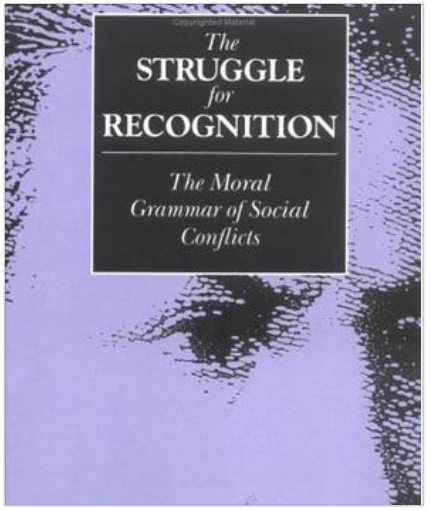
EMANCIPATION IN HEGEL'S METAPHYSICS AND SOCIAL THEORY? THE LIBERAL READING UNDER QUESTION // 15TH-16TH AUGUST 2024 // SOAS UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

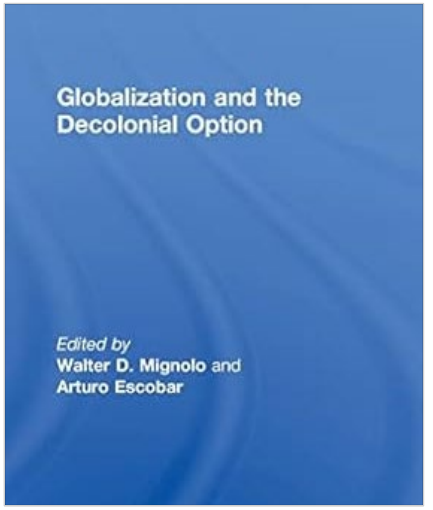
DR. THOMAS TELIOS

(University of St. Gallen)

Elective Affinities: From Ethics and Epistemology to Critical Social Ontology

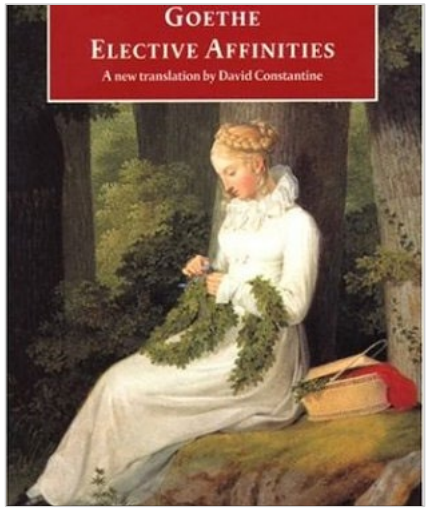


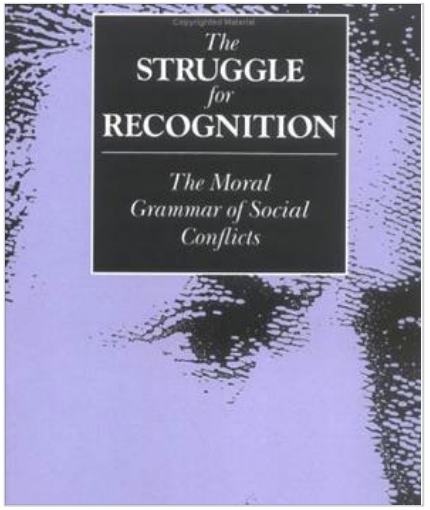


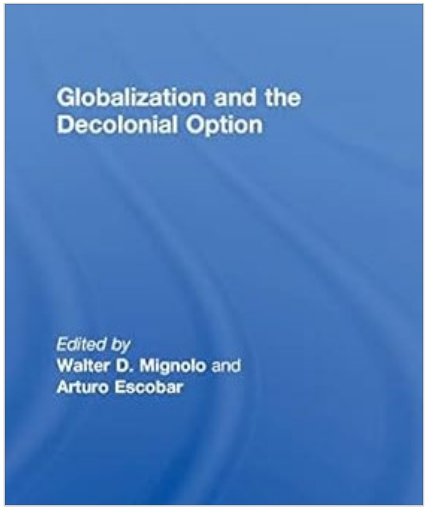


- **Recognition** as "**moral grammar**" for the study of social conflicts (Cf. Axel Honneth: *The Struggle for Recognition. The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, 1992)
- **Delinking** as "**epistemological grammar**" of De-Coloniality (Cf. Walter Mignolo: "Delinking: The Rhetoric of Modernity, the Logic of Coloniality and the **Grammar** of De-Coloniality", in: *Globalization and the Decolonial Option*, edited by Walter D. Mignolo and Arturo Escobar, 303-368, 2010)

Elective Affinities: From Ethics and Epistemology to Critical Social Ontology

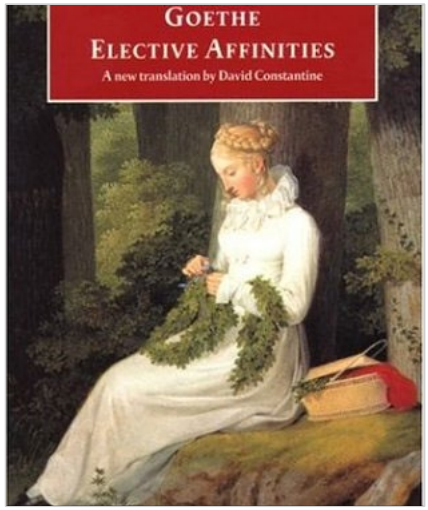


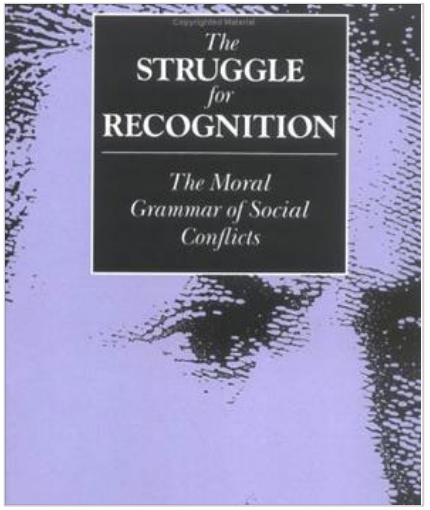


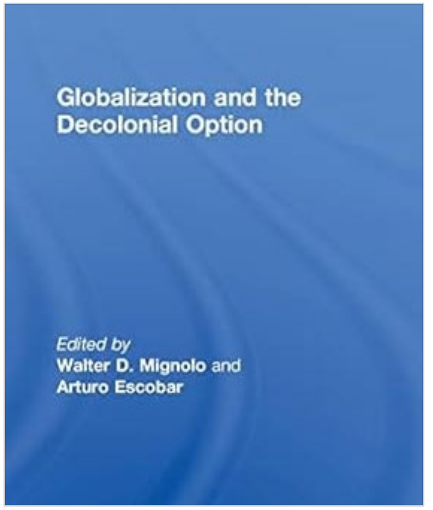


- **Elective Affinities** (Empedocles): A scientific term to explain the different modes of relationalization/interaction between chemical elements.
- **Elective Affinities** (Goethe): Applied this term as a parable for human passions and relations supposedly being governed by such laws of affinity.

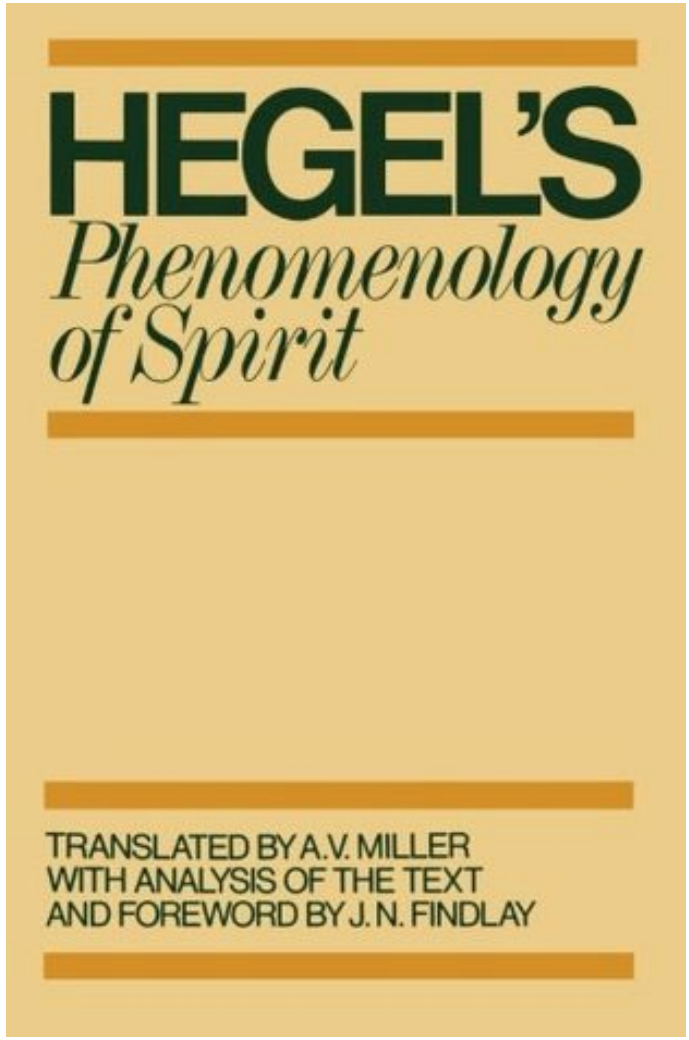
Elective Affinities: From Ethics and Epistemology to Critical Social Ontology







- **Aim:** To extrapolate from the ethical (Frankfurt School/Honneth) and epistemological (Decoloniality/Mignolo) interpretations of Hegel **social-ontological** implications that underline the **relational**, **inclusive** and **open-ended collectivity** of the Hegelian system.



Entry point: The minor *Doppelsatz*

"177. A self-consciousness exists *for a self-consciousness*. Only so is it in fact self-consciousness; for only in this way does the unity of itself in its otherness become explicit for it. The 'I' which is the object of its Notion is in fact not 'object'; the object of Desire, however, is only independent, for it is the universal indestructible substance, the fluid self-identical essence. A self-consciousness, in being an object, is just as much 'I' as 'object'. With this, we already have before us the Notion of *Spirit*. What still lies ahead for consciousness is the experience of what Spirit is – this absolute substance which is the unity of the different independent self-consciousnesses which, in their opposition, enjoy perfect freedom and independence!

'I' that is 'We' and 'We' that is 'I'.

It is in self-consciousness, in the Notion of Spirit, that consciousness first finds its turning-point, where it leaves behind it the colourful show of the sensuous here-and-now and the nightlike void of the supersensible beyond, and steps out into the spiritual daylight of the present." (110-111)

De dicto vs *de re* interpretation (Robert Brandom)

DE DICTO

- "One seeks to know so thoroughly what an author actually said, how his thought developed over his lifetime, what the rhetorical strategy of each work is and how it was understood by its author as fitting into the oeuvre, what his extraphilosophical concerns, attitudes, and experiences were that one can answer questions on his behalf in something like his own voice. One wants to be able to say what the author *would in fact have said* in response to various questions of clarification and extension."

Robert Brandom: *Tales of the Mighty Dead. Historical Essays in the Metaphysics of Intentionality*, 2002, 98-99.

DE RE

- "The aim of a *de re* interpretation of a text is […] to determine not what the author himself would have said about this or that, but what *really* follows from the claims he makes, what follows from them in truth (TMD 100). In this case, the context of interpretation is supplied by other claims that the *interpreter* (rather than the author) holds to be true. When it is argued that a commitment follows *in fact* from a philosopher's claims, the interpreter has to make reference to the facts *'as she takes them to be,* that is the best any of us can do' (TMD 101)."

Stephen Houlgate: "Phenomenology and De Re Interpretation: A Critique of Brandom's Reading of Hegel." *Bulletin of the Hegel Society of Great Britain*, 29, 57/58 (2008): 30.

A *de re* interpretation of the minor *Doppelsatz*

'I' THAT IS 'WE' (THE PROGRESSIVE PART)

- The subject (I) is a historical entity that is embedded in collective social structures and political institutions (WE);
- The subject (I) is a processual, if not socially constructed, entity and therefore the collective result of more than one ways of subjectivity production (WE);
- There are more than one identity (I) that house the subject's body (WE);
- The subject (I) finds itself at home in the holism of being-by-oneself-with-the-other (WE).

'WE' THAT IS 'I' (THE CONSERVATIVE PART)

- The different identities (WE) are to be subsumed under one dominant identity (I);
- The different forms and spheres of socialization (WE) are to be hierarchized under one primary mode of socialization (I);
- The historical and social processes are to be reversed in favour of a static understanding of subjectivity;
- The symmetrical recognition (WE) that characterizes the double relationship of the subject to the Other and the Other to the subject is to be modified so that a victorious and solipsist 'I' is reinstated that has assimilated and appropriated its/the Other (I).

A *de re* interpretation of the minor *Doppelsatz*

‘I’ THAT IS ‘WE’ (THE PROGRESSIVE PART)

- Historicity;
- Processuality;
- Plurality;
- Collectivity.

‘WE’ THAT IS ‘I’ (THE CONSERVATIVE PART)

- Reductionist;
- Hierarchical;
- Static;
- Solipsist.

Aim of the paper (revisited)



In juxtaposing ethical (Frankfurt School/Honneth) and epistemological (Decoloniality/Mignolo) interpretations of Hegel, I wish to extrapolate **social-ontological** implications. My reading moves from the **moral grammar** to the **practical *syn*tax** and underlines the **relational**, **inclusive** and **open-ended** **collectivity** of the Hegelian system.



To do so, I suggest we use the Decolonial operation of De-/Relinking as introduced by Samir Amin in economic contexts and expanded as an epistemological concept by Arturo Escobar and most profoundly by Walter Mignolo.



In doing so, I aim to demonstrate that neither solely the first („progressive:“, collectivist, pluralist, inclusive, processual) part nor solely the second („conservative:“, atomistic, authoritarian, and static) part of the Hegelian minor *Doppelsatz* are the right ones, i.e., reflect most optimally the spirit of Hegelian dialectics.



Rather, it is the necessity of having to take both parts into account that is essential in order to assess the merits of the first part and become aware of the dangers lurking in the second part.

Walter Mignolo's Concept of De-/Relinking

- The Critical Project of the Frankfurt School as a Foil to launch Decolonial Thought:

- "How does Horkheimer's 'critical theory' project look to us today, when global and pluri-versal 'revolutions' are taking place, out of the di-versity and pluri-versity of the many local histories that […] couldn't avoid the contact, conflict, and complicity with the West […]? What should 'critical theory' aim to be when the *damnés de la terre* are brought into the picture, next to Horkheimer's proletarians or today's translation of the proletariat, such as the multitudes? What transformations are needed in the 'critical theory' project if gender, race, and nature were to be fully incorporated into its conceptual and political framework? Finally, how can 'critical theory' be subsumed into the project of modernity/coloniality and decolonization? Or would this subsumption perhaps suggest the need to abandon the twentieth century formulations of a critical theory project? Or, would it suggest the exhaustion of the project of modernity?"

Walter Mignolo: "Delinking: The Rhetoric of Modernity, the Logic of Coloniality and the Grammar of De-Coloniality", 303-304.

Walter Mignolo's Concept of De-/Relinking

- **Main axes of Delinking:** Delinking connotes

1. **An epistemic shift:** It brings to the foreground other epistemologies, other principles of knowledge and understanding enabling thereby a new **type of "inter-cultural" and "inter-epistemic communication"**.

2. A new **type of knowledge** that denounces the universality bestowed to a body of (rational, economic, cultural, embodied etc.) knowledge allowing for a form of "**Other-Universality**", i.e., of "**Pluriversality**" as form of *universalizeable* (T.T.) and maybe even **universal** (W.M.) project to manifest itself.

3. The (logical) **unavoidability/necessity** of the Other by acknowledging at the same time the **limitations/insufficiency** and **danger** of both the subject and the Other in response to each other. [Necessity as historical and logical modality of dialectics is unquestionable, and it will turn out to be fundamental for the scope of my paper.]

4. **Historicity (as further modality of unavoidability/necessity)**: "Delinking requires that economic, political, philosophical, ethical, etc., conceptualization based on principles that makes the Bible, Adam Smith and Karl Marx necessary (because Western categories of thoughts have been globalized through the logic of coloniality and the rhetoric of modernity) but highly insufficient." (Delinking, 313)

5. **Border Thinking** and **Pluriversality**: "Critical border thinking is the method that connects pluriversality (different colonial histories entangled with imperial modernity) into a uni-versal project of delinking from modern rationality and building other possible worlds." (Delinking, 352)

Delinking as Method towards Trans-Modernity



- "Why—after all—aim for a **synthesis** (of Critical Theory and Decolonial Thought; T.T.) and not for a world in which many worlds (in this case, theoretical worlds) would **coexist** and work together in their **respective** milieus? Is it necessary to make one out of two?."

  Walter Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity. Global Futures, Decolonial Options*, 2011, 323.

- "**Trans-modernity** would be the overall orientation of de-colonizing and of delinking projects; an orientation toward **pluri-versality** as universal project leading toward a world in which many worlds will co-exist."

  Walter Mignolo: "Delinking: The Rhetoric of Modernity, the Logic of Coloniality and the Grammar of De-Coloniality", 2010, 317.

From Emancipation to Liberation

- Trans-Modernity "is the ethical principle of **liberation** of the negated Other […] defined as a project for overcoming modernity not simply by negating it but ***by thinking about it from its underside*** (my emphasis; T.T.), from the perspective of the excluded other. Trans-modernity is **a future-oriented** project that seeks the **liberation** of all humanity (Dussel, *The Underside of Modernity*, 1996), 'a worldwide ethical **liberation project** in which **alterity**, which was part and parcel of modernity, would be able to fulfil itself' (Dussel, "Europe, Modernity, and Eurocentrism", 2000), 'in which both modernity and its negated alterity (the victims) co-realize themselves in a process of mutual fertilization' (Dussel, "Eurocentrism and Modernity", 1993)."

Arturo Escobar: "Worlds and Knowledges Otherwise: The Latin American Modernity/Coloniality Research Program", in: *Globalization and the Decolonial Option*, edited by Walter Mignolo and Arturo Escobar, 2010, 41.

From Emancipation to Liberation

EMANCIPATION

- Emancipation as a project of (self-)determination inherent to Western Enlightenment.
- Transformation ***within*** the colonial matrix of power.
- Addresses the subordinated.
- Critical Theory (Marxism, Frankfurt School, Secular Left).

LIBERATION

- It refers to "two different and interrelated struggles: the political and economic decolonization and the epistemological decolonization" (Delinking, 308)
- It involves and addressed a series of equally entangled struggles, like gender, race, sexuality etc.
- Decolonial liberation liberates the colonizer and the colonized (Delinking, 311).
- Addresses the excluded.
- Radical/Decolonial/Universal Project.

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- Addresses the excluded.
- Radical/Decolonial/Universal Project.

IS LIBERATION **CONCEPTUALLY** (epistemologically, practically, and truly) POSSIBLE?

From Liberation to Relationality

- **(<u>Radical) Relationality</u>**:
- Relationality "refers to the fact that all entities that make up the world are so deeply interrelated that they have no intrinsic, separate existence by themselves."
- **"Week relationality"** (paradigmatic for modernist politics): "Entities are first assumed to be ontologically separate; then they are reunited through some sort of connection, such as a "network," but even when this is done, it is clear that the entities, now found to be related, preexist the connection. More importantly, modernist forms of politics stem from ontologies that are deeply embedded in the negation of the full humanity of multiple others and the nonhuman, and this has to be taken seriously into account when considering them as strategies for action."
- **"Strong Relationality"** (paradigmatic for decolonial thought and struggles): "In radical ontological politics, by contrast, there are no intrinsically existing entities to be found, since nothing preexists the relations that constitute it; in other words, reality is relational through and through."

Arturo Escobar: *Pluriversal Politics. The Real and the Possible*, 2020, xiii-xiv.

From Relationality to Relationalization

- While **emancipation** connotes a movement of self-determination within a given setting, **liberation** seems to the suggest the possibility of overcoming this framework which Mignolo obviously rejects.
- From this perspective, I find Escobar's concept of **relationality** more accurate than Mignolo's reappropriation of Dussel's concept of liberation:
- **"Week relationality"** suggests or refers to the concept of synthesis or sublation (*Aufhebung*), where the subject and the Other exist as such before entering in relationship to one another.
- In contrast, **"strong relationality"** seems to assume that what qualifies the subject (as a subject) and the Other (as a subject and as the Other of the subject) is them both being already part of a relation ***through which*** they get qualified as subject and/or as subject and as the Other of the subject, respectively.
- Therefore, however, I would find it even more accurate to speak not of relationality but of **relationalization**.

Recognition, the Communal, Collectivity

- **Recognition:**
- **"Simple Recognition":** The stance that the Other can attract the subject rendering thereby the Other capable of being recognized. (248-253)
- **"Robust Recognition"**: The condition where the Other is being recognized as a Recognizer (normative presupposition of "simple recognition"; 253-258)
- **Recognition as Vector of Communalization**: "Both self-conscious individual selves and the communities they inhabit (a *kind* of universal characterizing them; my emphasis) are synthesized by reciprocal recognition among particular participants in the practices of such a recognitive community. For Hegel, self-consciousness is essentially, and not just accidentally, a *social* achievement." (245)

Robert Brandom, *A Spirit of Trust. A Reading of Hegel's Phenomenology*, 2019.

Recognition, the Communal, Collectivity

- The "common" just like the "universal" underline **sameness**.
- On the contrary, the "**communal**" and the "**pluriversal**" are:
  - A type of **collective management of resources** (324);
  - **Interacting** forms of **knowing** and **doing** (ibid.);
  - Characterized by a form of **futural horizon** (ibid.);
  - A particular and concretized **reinscription** *(not adaptation*; T.T.) and **re-organization** of the pluriversal project in local relationships (**"pluriversal localism"**);
  - Not what we share despite our differences, but what **includes** us and allows us to experience our differences.

Walter Mignolo, "The Communal and the Decolonial", in: *Rethinking Intellectuals in Latin America*, edited by Mabel Moraña and Bret Gustafson, 245-264, 2010.

Recognition, the Communal, Collectivity

- **<u>Importance of Communal vs the Common and of Pluriversal vs the Universal:</u>**

- "Planetary communal "orders" are based on pluriversality as a universal project […] rather than on a "communal global order" (a commonwealth or a universal commons) that would be monocentric, universal, and endorse the imperiality of objectivity and truth without parenthesis. This premise is crucial to understanding my argument, for if you read my argument with the expectations created by modernity (from the Left and from the Right)—that a global order is necessary and that global order is equated with one project, then you will miss the main point and get derailed in your interpretation. The global order I am advocating is pluriversal, not universal. And that means to take pluriversality as a universal project to which all contending options would have to accept."

Walter Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity. Global Futures, Decolonial Options*, 2011, 23.

Recognition, the Communal, Collectivity

- **<u>Collectivity:</u>**
- Collectivity specifies and stresses following issues that could eventually go astray under the concepts of the "communal" and the "pluriversal":

1. The different forms of **entanglement**, **enlacement** and **interlacing** of the different forms of knowing and acting.
2. **(More) Permanent form of Organisation**.
3. The **necessity** of having to take into account both the subject and its/the Other, *first,* **as such** and, *second*, in **their entanglement** in order for us to conceptualize the subject and its/the Other but also in order for the subject and its/the Other to self-conceptualize themselves as such.

From Emancipation and Liberation to Collective Self-Determination

- **Liberation** as **"collective self-determination"** (Saar):
- As Martin Saar argues, in order to understand the individual, we need to address it in relation to a collective, where the individual is not a part of the collective, but as the **"relation between interrelated poles"** (7). The individual (I) and the collective (WE) are ***not*** **self-referential** or **self-determined** ***but*** **collectively determined through the relationalization of the one to the other**.
- Collectivity is for Saar:
  - an **analytical necessity**;
  - a **conceptual necessity**;
  - a **politically necessary form of practice**.

Martin Saar, "What is Social Philosophy? Or, Order, Practice, Subject", *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 138, 2 (2018): 4-19.

Collectivity as Condition towards the Transformation of Absolute Knowledge to a Negative Utopia

- **<u>Collectivity as Vector of (epistemological) Openness</u>**
- Concept of **epistemological utopia**: "the search for either a perfect certainty or an ultimate source of cognitive values" (Leszek Kolakowski: 'The Death of Utopia Reconsidered,' in: *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values*, 229-247, 1982).
- The relationalization of the subject and its/the Other disallows knowledge to complete itself.
- Cf. Pinkard's **provisionality** of absolute knowledge: "Any *allegedly* final account can itself only be *provisionally* final, that it too must be expected to undermine itself as the conditions under which it is to be realized develop themselves." (Terry Pinkard: *Hegel's Phenomenology. The Sociality of Reason,* 1994, 339-340)
- I would argue, however, that relationalization and collectivity render the absolutization of knowledge impossible from the very outset. That renders absolute knowledge to a **<u>form of negative epistemological utopia</u>**.

Towards a Decolonial Reading of Dialectics

- **Right-Hegelians** would argue that the "'We' that is 'I'" (the conservative part) corresponds to the correct reading of the minor *Doppelsatz*.
- **Left-Hegelians** or (current) **post-metaphysical critical thinkers** would argue that the "'I' that is 'We'" (the progressive part) is paradigmatic for the minor *Doppelsatz*: Through underlining collective struggles (Left-Hegelians) or through engendering a series of concepts like *negativity* (Adorno); the *slave/bondsman* (Susan Buck-Morss); *plasticity* (Malabou); *restlessness* (Nancy) etc. Hegelian epistemology makes sure that it will be open and transformative.

Towards a Decolonial Reading of Dialectics

- **Decolonial reading** of Hegelian dialectics argues for something different:
- That **dialectics** (as process of knowing and acting) does ***not*** strive towards *harmonization* (I > WE; conservative reading; cf. yesterday's discussion after Sybol's KN) ***nor*** does it guarantee axiomatically/on principle *openness*, *inclusion*, *diversity*, the *respect of difference*, *plurality* etc. (We > I; progressive reading).
- Should dialectics be either the former ***or*** the latter, then this would **reinstitute disjunctive binarities** (either … or …) to which decoloniality is axiomatically opposed.

Towards a Decolonial Reading of Dialectics

- On the contrary, a **decolonial reading of dialectics** underlines that in order for dialectics to be transformative and critical:
- (i) we need to **necessarily** take into account both the I and the We and realize that within every relationalization lurk **dangers** that cannot be avoided. Disposing of either the I or the WE in order to get rid of the dangers would be impossible/unthinkable, i.e., as long as we still wish to move within a Hegelian conflictual/relationalist paradigm.
- (ii) At the same time, not any critique or transformation deserves to be evaluated as such. Rather, in order to be established as such Hegelian/decolonial critique and transformative practices need to make sure that **epistemological tools** and **forms of practices** are conceptualized and implemented that **guarantee and allow for relationalization** and **collective self-determination** as forms of (collective self-)conceptualization and (collective self-)actualization.

From Absolute Knowledge to Wayfaring Knowledge

- "There are "worlds" we enter at our own risk, "worlds" that have agon, conquest, and arrogance as the main ingredients in their ethos. These are "worlds" that we enter out of necessity and that would be foolish to enter playfully in either the agonistic [competitive, self-important, unalterable] sense or in my sense [playfulness as performative practice that turns activity into an activity that is creative, has no rules, is self-constructive, and open to surprise; T.T.]. […] To be in those "worlds" in resistance to their construction of ourselves as passive, servile, and inferior is to inhabit those selves ambiguously, through our first-person memories of lively subjectivity. But there are "worlds" that we can travel to lovingly, and traveling to them is part of loving at least some of their inhabitants. The reason I think that **traveling** to someone's "world" is a way of **identifying *with* them** is that by traveling to their "world" we can understand **what it is to *be* them** and **what it is to be *ourselves* in *their* eyes**. Only when we have travelled to each other's "worlds" are we fully subjects to each other. (I agree with **Hegel** that self-recognition requires other subjects, but I disagree with his claim that it requires tension or hostility.)"

María Lugones: *Pilgrimages = Peregrinajes: theorizing coalition against multiple oppressions*, 2003, 96.



THANK YOU!