

# The Property and the Boundary

## - From a philosophical view -

by Professor Dr. Klaus Kummer, Magdeburg, Germany

---

### Abstract

The Greeks and Romans were the first who grappled intensively with the **concept** of *boundary*. The Greek worldview focussed much more on the concept of finiteness than on infiniteness because only the notion of finiteness implies measurement and shape, and shapelessness was considered as an expression of imperfection. "But Nature flies from the infinite, for the infinite is unending or imperfect, and Nature ever seeks an end." (*Aristotle*). In terms of the origin of terms, the Greeks are speaking of *óras*, *péras* and *térma*, the Latin equivalents are the terms *finis*, *limes* and *terminus*. The French language comprises a wide range of terms for the concept of boundary using terms like *limite*, *frontière*, *borne* and *extrémité*. The English language uses terms like *frontier*, *limits*, *border* and *boundary*. The German terms *Grenze*, *Schranke* and *Ende* are derived from the Slavic languages (Polish: *granica*; Czech: *hranica*).

Several famous philosophers like *Leibnitz*, *Kant*, *Hegel* and *Jaspers* dealt with the **phenomenon** of *boundary*. They emphasised that it was impossible to develop the world without using the concept of boundary. Boundaries define existence, they determine human identity. Boundaries give a character to things. Furthermore, boundaries do not only imply the things by which they are bordered because the end of one thing is the beginning of the next; border means both boundary of one thing and of another thing. One can only be aware of the common ground of different things by differentiating them.

The **process** of demarcation was first mentioned in the story of Creation. Heaven and earth, light and darkness as well as water and earth are delimited. Paradise is another concept basically implying boundaries. In the course of time, the concept of boundary has changed. Herdsmen and nomads had another idea of it than tillers after they settled down. Boundaries become even more important in the context of crowding many into a minimum of space because boundaries help to get space for every individual so that others do not come too close.

Some philosophers had however a **critical** view of boundaries. *Rousseau*, *Marx* and *Tucholsky* emphasised this view and came out against property and boundaries. *Hieronimo*, chief of the Apaches, said wistfully about more than 100 years ago that he was born where the wind blew freely over the plains, where the sun shone and where there were no boundaries. Were there really no boundaries? *Leonardo da Vinci* said about 500 years ago that where there were no boundaries there was no shape. Nowadays, it becomes clear that boundaries imply esteem, respect and recognition. According to Goethe they are not designed to be overstepped, but to be noticed. Boundaries protect identities and appreciate, recognise foreign matters. They are to keep difference but not disparity.

In this context, the **notion of property** becomes important. Nowadays, private property is an uncontested objective for broader classes in terms of social, economic and welfare issues. Private property is an essential regulative factor, but it requires social commitment. Security for land ownership, which is guaranteed by the constitution in many states, is based on social justice and social peace. We know that public goods like air, water and climate are much more mistreated. It is even the church doctrine that has supported from the beginning on security and protection of property mentioned in the 7<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> commandments.

**Our professional engagement** is positioned right in the middle of this context. According to Horaz there is a measurement for everything because in the end there are boundaries. Consequently, human beings are demarking beings because boundaries guarantee differentiation and identity of human beings. Demarcation is a basic factor of personhood. Demarcation is highly communicative because the more and the more precise a measurement is defined with regard to somebody else, the more one refers to this human being. Consequently, the profession of surveyors can be characterised by far-reaching social acceptance. We should take it to develop and emphasise our profession. In this context we can mark spatial matters. In the past walls were erected by others here and there. Human beings should take animals, which also delimit their habitats, as an example in the context of demarcation. Other animals respect their territory because they send out positive signals. If we take for example oscine birds, their territory is recognised where their singing is fully effective.