

Framing Diversity in Critical Dialogue to Strengthen Vivacious Societies.

A practically informed philosophical proposal for
attuning progressive diversity discourses to
human and sociocultural growth.

International Tübingen
Symposium on Ethics 2017
25.7.2017

Christoph Trüper (M.A.)
Goethe University Frankfurt
www.text-traeger.info

(Re-)Stating diversity

- A frequent, vague, exalted use of „diversity“: Diversity as an enrichment, mitigator/solver of problems in progressive discourses.

Metaphor of „colour“, „richness/treasure“, ...

- Diversity can be inimical to personal/ social growth. A wide range of variation is bound to comprise some negative elements. To relativistically abandon the notion of negativity is no solution → as real-life consequences need to be heeded.
- **Required: A more nuanced approach** to existent variation, to clarify which diversity to cultivate.

„cultural diversity“ / „human diversity“

... as normative key concepts (*versatile!*)

„Diversity Day“ s, (End of May)

„Diversity Charrter“; „Bunt statt Braun“

... as anti-nazi motive (*colour*)

German and
International
Examples (EU, UN)
[omitted for reasons
of time]



„Diversity
makes us
better“

seen with
Deutsche Bank,
Frankfurt

Themes/ Assets of Diversity

- Variation / change (curiosity against monotony)
- Practical learning (enhancement, adaption)
- Equality Anti-discrimination / Anti Superiority policies
- **Other motives:**
 - pragmatic management of observable variation/ aspiration to unambitious strategies;
 - an illicit 'spill over' of **aesthetic categories** into practical public life (→ J.Habermas, 1988)

Disabilities and Diversity?

- A strong movement to de-stigmatise disability by including it seamlessly into human diversity; beset with conceptual tensions. Examples:
 - Bundespräsident v. Weizsäcker's speech:
„Es ist normal, verschieden zu sein“.
„It is normal to be different [\approx diverse]“:
Disability as **attractive variation** (par. 1-3) **vs.**
Disability **as a blight** (\approx par. 5ff.)
 - Verena Bentele, introd. Ger. version UN-CRPD
 - UN CRPD: diversity vs. medical/ assistance needs
- Deafness as **elective disability**: Intentionally having deaf children...?!

Disabilities and Diversity?

- Focus: **Which Diversity** ?
- Discerning / differentiated view on Diversity: Where exactly is the good (*bonum*) in human diversity?
Is it to be sought even if it brings burdens/adversities/vicissitudes?
- Consider A. Kuhlmann (2005): Caution not to regard 'diversity as if it was an end-in-itself' (nicht: *Vielfalt als Selbstzweck*) with regard to human lives

V. Bentele on UN-CRPD

- “ That **Diversity** shall be our obvious key concept, together with the basic attitude that every individual person is valuable with the capacities and pre-conditions (s)he brings. To this end, we will need new ways of thinking in many areas. ”
- „Dass unser selbstverständliches Leitbild **Vielfalt** wird und die Grundhaltung, dass jede und jeder Einzelne wertvoll ist mit den jeweiligen Fähigkeiten und Voraussetzungen. Dafür müssen wir in vielen Bereichen neu denken.“

[Working translation, PCT]

Deaf Culture - Outline

- Deafness as a **cultural identity** (*ethnicity*) rather than a physical deficit (medical problem)
 - Visual way of being in the world
 - Access to sign languages;
- Other, non-linguistic benefits of hearing are strongly de-emphasised → (physical) deafness as „**positive stigma**“.
- Claims to **recognition** and substantial support (accommodation) as cultural minority *vis-à-vis* the mainstream society.

Quotations from proud deaf

parents (from: L. Mundy, 2002)

>> Some people look at it like, 'Oh my gosh, you shouldn't have a child who has a disability,' " signs Candy. "But, you know, black people have harder lives. Why shouldn't parents be able to go ahead and pick a black donor if that's what they want? They should have that option. They can feel related to that culture, bonded with that **culture**.

>> But deaf children, Sharon argues, **make a society more diverse**, and **diversity makes a society more humane**.

Plenty of individuals and groups receive public support, and if you start saying which costs are legitimate and which aren't, well, they believe, it's a slippery slope.

Deafness as Elective Disability

State of the Debate in Britain

- It is still **illegal to select** embryos with impairments, including deafness. (Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 2008, Sect. 14/ 4/9)
- **Deaf culture** seems very much alive, relying on a language-based conception
- The protection of sign language/ deaf culture and disability as diversity by the **UN CRPD**, applicable in Britain
- **Insecurities:** Changing disability rights situation in Britain.

Why dialogue as a vehicle?

- **"Normalcy"**

Disqualifying diversity as deviation

- Devaluation / exclusion
- Uncritically negative
- Totalising/ authoritarian

- **"Inclusive Utopia"**

Celebrating diversity

- Uncritical revaluation of diversity (exaltation)
- Uncritically positive; flexible and open-minded, but possibly hazardous.

Dialogue:

- + Some critical deliberation
- + Open to various viewpoints, but discerning
- + Opportunity for review in the absence of supreme insight.

Dialogue: General Characteristics

- **Main aim:** Clarify a given proposal seeking inclusion; explore where on the spectrum of diversity it belongs (incl. possible hassards). ↔ **Main danger:** Re-marginalisation; Re-assertion of unjust inequalities
- What does the **variant** / difference consist in?
- What problem of life does it respond to? What spiritual place does it hold?
- What/where **are assets/ challenges, (dis-)advantages;** dangers with due regard to a shared social world and to a **(extra-)social external reality** (occurrence → effect)
- In how far can the variant be accomodated in the common life-world?

Outlining the Mode of Dialogue

- Starting Point: Shared belief in the value of variation (principle)

“My solution is one among others”

- Awareness of / Responsibility for external world
- Take a stance of **internal criticism**: Tentatively accepting major suppositions, convictions, arguments, **but** perseverently inquiring into reasons, demanding clarifications, probing for plausibility, checking validity/ weight of (social/hard) facts

... Set it in Motion!



Mental tools:

- A (loosely) coherentist reasoning / approach
- A special awareness for argumentative transitions (Ch. Taylor); for ambiguities.
Enhanced 'moral imagination'
(→ M. Nussbaum)
- Empathetic approaches, reasoning from analogue/
guided by metaphor;
(self-)critical practical reason
- Utilise / re-philosophise techniques developed in
intercultural communication, psychology/ coaching

External facts?

- The status/valence of facts may be called into question.
 - Substantiate challenge
 - Idea: Observable/physical facts as extremely robust nodes (or: links) within the network under scrutiny
- **The intertwining of facts/ values** becomes accessible
- **Concerning (human) physicality:** The value of natural diversity/ 'the natural' is subject to discussion, not presupposition.

Prospects, Challenges, Hopes

- The proposed conception demands considerable efforts, esp.: in intercultural communication
 - Civil society: intact infra-structure sustaining an excellent climate of discussion [...]
 - Individual actor: consideration, self-discipline/temperation, openness ...
- **Stakes** → **Strains** on Intercultural Communication are high
- Failing with totalitarian ('absolutist') ideologies / some forms of esp. strict religious convictions ↔ **diversity?**

Prospects... or Hopes?

- Recognise and deflect (potential) **harm / negativity** while cultivating diversity
 - **Nuanced approach** to variants: from tolerating to protecting, enhancing; abolishing if necessary.
'Tree of diversity': Taxonomy of reactions
- **Avoid scornful attitudes against "diversity"** that capitalise on implausible/ repellent examples ('outcomes') by negotiating **assets and burdens**

- Opening an avenue to **cultural growth**
 - Personal growth of participants through deliberation; enhancement of their self-description and insight.
 - Culturally: Evolution of existing positions
- Capturing the **initial promises of „diversity“**:
 - „Diversity“ is demanding, if seriously pursued.
 - Conception of „Diversity“ is easy to deconstruct/disassemble, even more so than „Toleration“
 - Prevent: “Diversity with closed borders and clenched teeth” → **Vivacious societies!**
- Explicitly building on **Pluralistic Democracy**.

Points of Debate with 'Deaf Culture'

- The value(s) of 'hearing' (esp. non-linguistic)
- The value(s) and specifics of a visual way-of-life
- Specifics of intercultural/societal cooperation:
Participation / accomodation, inclusion
- The future potential(s) of a child (or: society)
- The value of diversity vs. the concrete prospects in
life, concerning concrete persons
- Debate of rights, needs, responsibilities

Discussion / Conclusion

(1) Fully accept and appreciate diversity as a challenging concept, needing to face ambiguity and harm.

Evolve the concept!

(2) **Re-statement of Diversity:** No re-stigmatisation; re-marginalisation; No simplistic cover:

No balm to be put on urgent ethical questions calling for debate and decision

(3) A demise of „diversity“ is not an option. The stakes are too high. **Challenge:** Sensitive and sensible restatement of the concept, not to let the adversaries of an open society capitalise on the implausibilities of naive and simplistic diversity policies.

Thank you!

Talk and listen.

References (1)

- **[Philosophical]** J. Habermas (1988¹/ 12th ed. 2016): “Überbietung der temporalistischen Ursprungsphilosophie [...]”, with: “Exkurs zur Einebnung des Gattungsunterschieds zwischen Philosophie und Literatur” in J.H.: *Der philosophische Diskurs der Moderne: Zwölf Vorlesungen*, pp.191-247, esp. pp. 222 ff. (German, English trans. available)
- Ch. Taylor (2001/ 1989¹) *The Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity*. Harvard UP, Harvard,2001. Esp.: Chapter I. 1-2.
- M. Nussbaum (n.a.): My references are not to a particular work but to her general idea of “cultivating the inner eye” and the 'public political imagination', and I am referring to the general idea more than to any specific formulation. My most recent source of inspiration has been: M. Nussbaum (2012): *The New Religious Intolerance: Overcoming the Politics of Fear in an Anxious Age*. Harvard UP, Harvard,2012.
- A. Kuhlmann (2005¹/ 2011): “Behinderung und die Anerkennung von Differenz” repr. in: A.K.: *An den Grenzen unserer Lebensform: Texte zur Bioethik*. Inst. für Sozialforschung, Campus Verlag: Frankfurt/Main,2011 (in German).

References (2)

- **[Political]** Bundespräsident R. von Weizsäcker (1993): *Ansprache von Bundespräsident Richard von Weizsäcker bei der Eröffnungsveranstaltung der Tagung der Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft Hilfe für Behinderte* [unofficial title: „Es ist normal, verschieden zu sein“]. Accessible at: www.bundespraesident.de/SharedDocs/Reden/DE/Richard-von-Weizsaecker/Reden/1993/07/19930701_Rede.html. [in German].
 - V. Bentele (2017): [Untitled Introduction], in: *UN-Konvention über die Rechte von Menschen mit Behinderung*. Booklet. Accessible at: www.behindertenbeauftragte.de/SharedDocs/Publikationen/DE/Broschuere_UNKonvention_KK.html. [in German, my translation].
 - **[Legislation]** UN-CRPD (2008): *Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities* , accessible at : www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities.html
- [Press]** L. Mundy: „A World of Their Own“, in: *The Washington Post, Magazine*, 31.3.2002.