

# Framing Diversity in Critical Dialogue to Strengthen Vivacious Societies.

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

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# (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 → real-life consequences.
- **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:
  - Verena Bentele, introd. Ger. version UN-CRPD
  - UN CRPD: diversity vs. medical/ assistance needs
  - Bundespräsident v. Weizsäcker's speech:
    - „Es ist normal, verschieden zu sein“.
    - „It is normal to be different [ $\approx$  diverse]“.
- Deafness as **elective disability**: Intentionally having deaf children...?!

# 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.

# 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

# 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 problem of live 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** (occourance → 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
- **Facts**: Remain accessible by substantive arguments

# ... 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
- **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**
  - Deliberation and insight
  - Cultural evolution of existing positions
- Capturing the **initial promises of „diversity“**:
  - Finding a *modus vivendi*, sustaining learning opportunities
  - Prevent: “Diversity with closed borders and clenched teeth” → **Vivacious societies!**
  - Prevent an attractive diversity conception from getting dismembered
- Explicitly building on **Pluralistic Democracy**.

# 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.**

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