The Value of [Not] Being Diverse

An Interdisciplinary Exploration of Social Cohesion, Diversity, Moral Pluralism and their Limits

July 24-26, 2017

Call for Papers

"Social Cohesion", "Diversity" and "Pluralism" have become normative central guiding principles in democratic societies. However, the practical implementation of how to define social cohesion, deal with diversity and act in pluralistic societies is rather contested.

Recently, especially in the light of the growing numbers of refugees, the meaning and value of diversity has been both passionately confirmed and passionately contested: Proponents of diversity and plurality of values argue that diversity and (moral) pluralism represent common goods that have to be protected by and within democratic societies, with the aim to strengthen social cohesion and democracy. Opponents of diversity and the plurality of values often argue that too much diversity and (moral) pluralism represent a threat to social cohesion and ultimately endanger the integrity of societies.

Global challenges of, among others, extreme socio-economic inequalities, "failing states" and terrorism, as well as environmental degradation and climate change are bringing forth global migration; this increases the plurality of people and their values in already diverse societies. These processes have an impact of how social cohesion, diversity and moral pluralism are framed. Among others, this poses challenges to the whole education system.

On a more basic level, the question remains how the concept of diversity is shaped and justified with regard to the political and moral sphere. Here, for example, the relation between cultural and biological diversity is being negotiated and contested from several standpoints, reaching from biology-based functionalisms to (de)constructivist approaches. Both in cultural as well as in biodiversity conservation discourses, not every kind of diversity is cherished. But what are the reasons to distinguish "good diversity" from "bad diversity?"

Not least in the light of the alarming shifts to non-democratic populism in Europe and the USA there is an urgent need to re-debate diversity and moral pluralism: (How) Do they promote social cohesion? Or (where) do they undermine it?

Following the spirit of the "Tübingen approach" of an application-oriented ethics, this conference aims to encourage a broad interdisciplinary discussion on social cohesion, diversity and moral pluralism in contemporary societies. It is open to both theoretical as well as empirical approaches (including ethics, law, politics, sociology, psychology, anthropology, environmental sciences etc.). Conceptual and empirical contributions should help gaining insights into possible limitations inherent in the concepts of cultural diversity and moral pluralism and the specific implementation of pluralism, its chances, limitations and challenges in different contexts.

The following questions indicate the broad spectrum of basic conceptual to application-oriented issues. The questions are meant as examples and the list is hardly exhaustive. Questions developed from cross-cutting perspectives are of particular interest.

I. Conceptual and General Dimensions:

-   What is the nexus between „diversity" and „moral pluralism"?

- How to distinguish justified claims by different individuals/groups from not justified claims in a diverse society?
- Can moral/political pluralism reach a point where it self-destroys?
- Under which conditions can moral pluralism develop into its opposite, i.e. oppressive tolerance?
- Are there limits of diversity in plural societies or: how much diversity is enough?
- Is (moral) pluralism threatening, stabilizing or managing social cohesion?
- Is (moral) pluralism the cause of good life, the effect of good life, or a danger to good life?
- How can the relation between cultural and biological diversity be understood? Does it make sense to rather connect or to separate the respective dimensions? (What) Can biodiversity teach us about the value of social diversity and moral pluralism?
- What are the reasons to distinguish good diversity from bad diversity?

II. Specific Dimensions:

- Human diversity and equality: what are the central questions of promoting social justice?
- How to operate between factual diversity and/or plurality on the one hand and possible normative claims on the other hand?
- Populism and pluralism: elective affinities or mutual exclusion?
- Re-defining solidarity in the face of diversity: What is the role of (social) media.
- Diversity in education: factual challenge or method?
- What inherent connections – and conflicts – exist between cultural diversity and biological diversity in practical context, especially with regard to sustainable development?
- How do social diversity and moral pluralism relate to economic systems? Do social diversity and moral pluralism favor one economic system over another?

Abstract submission:

We are asking scholars from all disciplines interested in the conference topic(s) to suggest themes. Please submit an abstract of max. **400 words** until **December 15, 2016**, to ethics2017@izew.uni-tuebingen.de

Conference language is English.

The Values of [Non]Diversity shall be explored employing different formats of interaction: We will try to bring the conference not only to the lecture hall but also into the public space the city of Tübingen offers: Discussions could, for example, take place while punting on the river Neckar – clearly illustrating the fact the we are all in the same boat. Or does the Hölderlin's tower offer a safe refuge against the madness driving today's social questions? Further ideas and suggestions for unusual formats are welcome.