

## Hegel on diversity or why an insight in contradictions is important

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### Introduction: are we all living in the same boat? How the pandemic exposed ‘diversity’

We start with some bad news: the pandemic overcame us all. Wherever you lived, what your social position or gender is, you were confronted by this calamity over the past few years. However, as the saying goes, “we are all in the same boat,” we were not. Privilege erupted like a volcano hidden deep under water and made itself appear in an uncanny way (like eruptions of volcano’s mostly do). Online teaching showed maybe more than ever how diverse children - or for that matter adults - are. Some had a warm cozy room for themselves, with parents coming to their room every hour to check if everything goes well or to bring them a freshly made fruit salad to nourish their developing brains. The sad truth is that a lot of children (and adults) had a very rough time during the pandemic. They were stuck 24/7 in an unpleasant, horrible or violent environment, with maybe even no access to a computer to attend the online classes. The concept of ‘diversity’ became very clear to all of us during the pandemic, independent of how identical and “in the same boat” we all thought we were – and indeed the pandemic made no exceptions – still the situation was for everyone different. This article aims to contribute to the development of the notion of ‘diversity’. More specifically we will try to contribute with a philosophical point of view. This could go in many (diverse) directions, but we think that the very concept of ‘diversity’ needs to be purified before talking about it. Therefore, we will use the German philosopher G.W.F. Hegel (1770-1831).

When we hear the name ‘Hegel’ we probably think about his influence on – among others – Karl Marx, his book “*Phänomenologie des Geistes*”<sup>3</sup> should ring a bell too where we find the popular idea of the Master-Slave Dialectic. We are not going to discuss these topics here, but we will rather focus on an even darker and obscure part of the Hegelian corpus, namely his “*Wissenschaft der Logik*”<sup>4</sup>. This article will concern a philosophical/dialectical move which involves – on a metalevel – acritical investigation of the philosophical meaning of ‘diversity’. We will do that with insights from Hegel’s logic, which we will need to – due to the length of this article – simplify.

Our aim in this article is to therefore threefold: firstly, we want to show how abstract and difficult ideas can be reformed into concrete and understandable examples. This, hopefully, will allow us to have a better and more insightful understanding of diversity. Secondly, we want to show with Hegelian Logic that a concept, namely ‘diversity’, is not so simple as it may first seem. Thirdly, we claim that a better understanding in this Logic will enable us to see the world more clearly, which will have a direct impact concerning education. Let us start.

### An outline of Hegel his logic

We jump right into the core of Hegel’s logic, namely in the part which discusses the “Doctrine of Essence”. There he discusses in a dialectical manner logic and, as we shall see, this will be very insightful

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<sup>3</sup>Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, vertaald door Peter Fuss en John Dobbins (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2019).

<sup>4</sup>Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, onder redactie van George Di Giovanni, First paperback edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

concerning our topic 'diversity'. Hegel starts with pointing out how the first movement of the determination of the essence of being is *identity*. To formalize this, we can say  $A=A$ . To make this more concrete, in identity (again, one of the dialectical processes where we have to go through) people, for example<sup>5</sup>, would constitute their own being (or essence) purely with themselves.<sup>6</sup> They would say: "I am me,"<sup>7</sup> or formally  $I=I$ . They think they are strictly independent of other people. This logic indeed fits perfectly the Western ideal of the 'Self-Made Man'. But the dialectical process goes on and suddenly people find out they are actually not so independent as they first thought. Only the fact that we are raised by our parents and the fact that they taught us language – which is crucially to even say the sentence "I am I" – makes us not strictly identical with ourselves since we actually *need* other to become ourselves. Indeed, identity goes into *difference*, our second determination of the essence of being. Formally this means  $A \neq A$ , or  $A=B$ . To stay with our example of the constitution of the subject we now see that I is not I but that I am another, or to use the phrase of the French poet Arthur Rimbaud (1854-1891) "*Je est un Autre*"<sup>8</sup>.<sup>9</sup> The constitution of the subject takes place by mimetics and by learning from others, we understand in this dialectical process that we are not independent of others for our own subjectivity. But wait, how can there be both 'identity' and 'difference'? We have clearly here another type of logic who is waiting in the line, namely 'diversity'.<sup>10</sup>

We see that it is getting more complicated because now we have a diversity in our logic. Hegel points out – and this is crucial – that inherent to diversity there is an essential indifference. Indeed, the constitution of the subject does not associate him/herself in diversity to identity or to difference; rather it becomes one big messy hodgepodge. The subject who goes through the movement of diversity in our case would say: "I don't know any longer who I am, I am confused, and to be honest I really don't care. I rather be x, y, z, if that doesn't mix, it isn't my problem."<sup>11</sup> What do I want to say with all this? First, I want to show the relevance of Hegel his Logic and how it is applicable to create insight in many frameworks that governs the world. Second and most important I want to stand still with the concept of 'diversity'. For this we need to follow Hegel a little bit longer.

In diversity, we are confused, we don't know any longer who we are. This confusion, this identical crisis (I truly hope you feel how similar this is to the stage of adolescence) goes right into *opposition*, our next dialectical process. When an adolescent is confused about him/herself, he/she starts revolving

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<sup>5</sup>In this article we use in the main text examples of 'the constitution of the subject' for academic and philosophic reasons. However, in the footnotes I will try to make them applicable for our topic, which concerns the pandemic.

<sup>6</sup> There is a lot to say about putting 'Identity-politics' in this scheme of thoughts.

<sup>7</sup>A person which is in an 'identity logic' may say: "You and I, we are exactly the same. Indeed, we're all humans who are in the same boat."

<sup>8</sup>Arthur Rimbaud is indeed stretching the French language here, the proper way to say "I am an Other" in French would be "*J'ai un autre*" with the verb *having*. What is at stake here goes to the very core of our discussion, namely being. Rimbaud his poetical freedom and philosophical concern about *being* makes this sentence very appropriate for our discussion about 'Diversity and Linguistics'.

<sup>9</sup>Our person that lives during the pandemic and applies some 'difference logic' may say: "You and I, we are totally not the same. I have a nice house with a big garden to live in during the lockdown, you have just a small apartment."

<sup>10</sup>To be correct we need to mention that for Hegel there are only three movements: 1. Identity, 2. Difference and 3. Contradiction. However, Difference will determine itself in 1. absolute difference in identity, 2. diversity, 3. opposition, only then are identity and difference *aufgehoben* in the Contradiction. Diversity is not an *aufhebung* of identity and difference, but rather a second moment of Difference itself.

<sup>11</sup>This 'diversity logic' applied to a person during the pandemic may say: "We for sure don't live in the same boat, but to be honest, I even don't know in which boat I'm living. Even one boat has many departments like the Titanic, some for the poor, some for the middle class and some for the rich. I feel like Rose in Titanic, going up and down, confused where I belong."

against the world. The same holds for opposition, the indifference of diversity is gone and is replaced with a heed, a never-ending burning fire. A logic of opposition for the constitution of the subject would say something like this: "I may be a philosopher but actually I am not questioning myself at all, does this mean I am not a philosopher anymore? Or maybe we need to separate theory from practice! Yes, that will do. Oh no, I can't handle without a theoretical framework...".<sup>12</sup> Hopefully you feel the tension in the logic of opposition. Opposition, different than diversity is marked by a great non-indifference. No wonder that war for example mostly follows the logic of opposition.<sup>13</sup>

Finally, we come to a (temporarily) end station, but it is not a station where the sun forever shines and where people dance all the time in peace and drink Aperol Sprits. It is an end station, which is not easy to arrive. The end station is called '*contradiction*'. The logic of contradiction shows us the fundamental lack in every formalization of, for example, the constitution of the subject. To understand fully contradiction, we need to take a step back so we can move forward. In opposition, we saw that things are opposite to each other; let us take the example of a magnet. The negative side is opposite to the positive side. However, there is no negative side without a positive side and vice versa. So, we see how both sides constitute each other. We can go even a step further and say that the negative side *is* the positive side. This is the very core of contradiction. We get insight in how the mechanism of opposition works. Let us take our example of war. In a war we have (to simplify) two opposite groups. However, to get to the core of the logic of contradiction we should say that the identity of the one group is only formed by the opposite identity of the other group. We concretize. Let us take the example of WWII with on the one side the 'Allies' and on the other side the 'Axis Powers'. Both sides were blaming (among other things) each other in the most unhuman way possible. Nevertheless, precisely this mechanism of blaming – the French theorist René Girard (1923-2015) would later call it 'Scapegoating'<sup>14</sup>—is what forms the identity of each side. To say it differently, Hitler could not build his Arian identity without the Jew, without someone to blame and without someone to oppose oneself to. Consequently, the Jew was actually crucial for the identity of the Nazis, something that would horrify both parties if they would read this. We see the contradiction here: the Nazi says: "We are opposite to Jews, they are cockroaches, we are *Übermenschen*," but actually they need to say: "Without the Jew we are nothing, our whole identity is based on them, on people who we refuse to identify with."

The reader may ask him/herself what this all has to do with diversity in education. The reader may say to him/herself: "Well, here we have the typical philosophical move: deconstruction without a reconstructive solution." I can only say that this very deconstruction of the idea of diversity is in-itself already a reconstruction. What I mean by this is that I wanted to show how diversity takes place in Hegel his Logic (which I necessarily needed to oversimplify). Furthermore, this analysis of the concept of 'diversity' has an implicit political ambition as well, namely, let politicians not deny the contradictions that are necessarily involved in diversity but let them expose the contradictions so we can work them (ideally) out.

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<sup>12</sup>Opposition for a person during the pandemic would maybe mean something like this: "I am very aware of my privilege, but what can I do? I already gave my old computer to a poor child. But this is not enough! And the nurses need to be paid more, but is clapping hands every evening the right thing to do?"

<sup>13</sup> In a war it is common that both parties refuse to identify with each other, they describe each other as "The Other", mostly with very nasty rhetoric's were the opposite group is called cockroaches or whatever dehumanizes them. War will never occur in the logic of Diversity, but following Diversity necessarily goes right into opposition.

<sup>14</sup>René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, Bloomsbury Revelations (London ; New York: Bloomsbury Academic, an imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2017).

### **Hegel his logic applied to education**

Now, let us grab our insights and talk finally about diversity in education. We definitely see many dialectical movements we discussed in education and the politics which is necessarily involved in our educational system. More nationalistic countries with a violent history will educate people in a manner of *opposition*; cf. the rhetoric's of 'we against them'. However, *diversity* we definitely see as well, this would show up more in liberal democratic countries. Multiculturalism is being embraced and we are open to other diversities. Nevertheless, here comes Hegel, how nice this diversity may seem (and to be very political and explicit here, I am totally not against diversity), contradiction is always lurking from around the corner. In education we see how divers the classroom is, children are being taught how everyone is the same (identical) and have the same values and so on. But as we saw with the logic of *diversity* indifference rules. The schoolteacher may teach the children that everyone is the same but, in that way, she neglects the fact that not all children are the same. I mean by this that the focus on diversity may come along with the neglecting that there are indeed differences. Children may have at home totally different cultures, values and standards than the other children in their classroom. One child may be more privileged than the other child. One child hears every evening how his/her parents discuss the news of today on a fancy table in a big living room. Another child hears his mom crying because his dad is drunk because he lost his job (again). The first step for diversity to work is to be very aware of this difference. With other words, not to be indifferent. We cannot accept diversity if we are neglecting the contradictions that come along with it. For example, I have in mind concentration of minorities in parts of the city, implicit or explicit racism, privilege and so on. Second, embrace the contradiction that lurks around the corner. In a multicultural environment violence can occur, for example because of nationalistic historical rivalries, because children will constitute their identity by creating a scapegoat, someone they can rebel against. To make this as minimal as possible it is of a highly importance that they learn that this is only one movement in the dialectic, namely opposition, and that they have to develop to see the very contradiction of this (as I have tried to explain to you above).

### **Conclusion: what can be learned?**

What have we learned from this? Firstly, that diversity is not an easy concept. We need to see it in correlation to a lot more, namely: identity, difference, opposition and contradiction. Secondly, diversity is governed by indifference. To be aware of this is already a valuable lesson. Thirdly, do not be afraid of the contradictions that governs this world. They can expose a cruel truth, but to neglect this truth would be an even more cruelty.