Autonomy, Diversity, and the Common Good

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Preface

The theme of the 41st Philosophy of Religion Conference in Claremont was *Autonomy, Diversity and the Common Good*. It was chosen to honor the philosophical and theological achievements of Anselm K. Min, who has helped shape this conference for many years and who sadly died shortly after the conference in August 2020. He was the heart and soul of the PRT (Philosophy of Religion and Theology) program at Claremont Graduate University.

The volume is dedicated to the memories of Anselm Min and Joseph Prabhu. Joseph Prabhu has worked intensively for many years on the annual conference and has energetically supported its basic orientation of building bridges between the Western and Asian traditions in philosophy and theology. At the last conference he paid tribute to Anselm Min's person and work. He too passed away a few months later.

We are grateful to the *Udo Keller Stiftung Forum Humanum* (Hamburg), which has again generously provided ten conference grants to enable doctoral students and post-docs to take part in the conference and present their work on the theme of the conference. Five of those essays are published here along with the other contributions to the conference. We couldn't have done what we did without its support. We gratefully acknowledge the support of Pomona College which sponsored the conference for the last time. We are indebted to those who contributed to this volume, and to Mohr Siebeck who has accepted the manuscript for publication.

Marlene A. Block
Ingolf U. Dalferth

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Introduction: Autonomy, Diversity and the Common Good

Ingolf U. Dalferth

1. Diversity and Difference

Diversity is different from difference. We are all different from each other because we are who we are and not somebody else. Diversity, on the other hand, is not about the identity of individuals, but about group identity and group membership. Groups of people can be distinguished from others by natural (biological), cultural (linguistic, religious), social, political, economic, or a host of other differences. Their members may belong to different groups, where the differences are not mutually exclusive. But groups are always defined by demarcation from other groups. In the social and political sphere, different groups compete for resources, influence, and power in society. And they create winners and losers in this struggle for influence, power, and recognition. Identity politics responds by designing political agendas based on diversity issues that focus on inequality, discrimination, and inclusion of those who are marginalized or feel excluded in society. The issue is no longer just the identity of the individual, but above all the status of the group in society.

The shift from focusing on the individual to focusing on the group changes the whole debate. Autonomy is different when it comes to individuals or to groups. And the same is true for the common good. What individuals see as the common good that they seek or should seek is different from what competing groups strive for as the common goal or objective of their respective groups. In the first case, the common good is about something that is fundamentally the same for everyone and makes everyone equal; in the second case, it is rarely about anything other than the competitive struggle of groups to assert their own interests in society.

In both cases, religion, faith, and recourse to God can play a central role. But they do so in very different ways. In the first case, they serve to bring to bear the fundamental difference between the individual and the universal in such a way as to make possible not only the distinction between ourselves and others, but above all a critically discriminating relationship to ourselves. We are

enabled to see ourselves as another, as Paul Ricoeur put it.[1] Otherness is not just a characteristic of others, but a constitutive feature of our own self. But it is so in a deeper sense than often seen. We are not just what we think we are and what others think we are, but who we are in relation to God. This relationship does not appear in real life as such, but as an ideal of humanity to which we never conform in such a way that we could not and should not conform to it even better. We are never as God sees us. God looks not only at what we are in fact, but also at what we could and should be in his presence, and thus judges us not only in the light of our reality, but also in the light of our possibilities. Therefore, we must always strive to become what we are before God, and this cannot be done without critically distinguishing ourselves from what we are and becoming what we are not but could and should be.

The second case, on the other hand, is about the relative opposition between groups that have power and those that want to have power, and thus about how one group asserts its identity and enforces it against others. In such constellations, religion often functions not as a critical questioning of one's own convictions, but as an amplifier of group identity and group certainties, and thus brings about the opposite of what it does in the first case: not the possibility of a critical difference to oneself, but the fundamentalist conviction that the world is only seen correctly as one sees it oneself.

The double dialectic of individual and society and of different groups in society plays a crucial role in the philosophical and theological discussion about the meaning of religion, faith, and reference to God in the complex debate about autonomy, diversity and the common good. It deserves special attention today. That is what this volume is about.

2. The Precarious Status of a Shared Humanity

We live in a time of growing social and cultural diversity and inequality. This has increased the traditional tensions between individual freedom and social responsibility to a point where the binding forces of our societies seem to be exhausted. We all know that ultimate diversity is a fact. We all belong to different groups, and groups define themselves by marking themselves off from others. And we are all different because no one is identical to another, and no one remains completely the same over time. However, we are not first individuals and then also social beings. On the contrary, we exist from the beginning as social beings who cannot survive for long if we do not succeed in creating a common human habitat and culture. Precisely because we are all different, we need common social conventions and moral, legal, and political rules and

[1] P. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

institutions that allow us to live our diversity without endangering the life, freedom, and humanity of others.

The precarious culture of a shared humanity has been in crisis for some time. Where previously the commonalities of nature, culture, religion and tradition that connect us before we become an individual self were emphasized, we have learned to deconstruct these commonalities and replace them with our own cultural constructions without being disturbed by the biological, cultural, moral or religious limitations of earlier times.

However, instead of creating a society of equals, for which many have hoped, we have increased inequality and injustice in our societies to an unprecedented degree. We fight for our individual identities, rights, and claims, often without much concern for those of others, and we do so at both ends of the power divide in our societies by different means. Those in power act as if everyone in our democracies had equal access to the institutions of education and politics, even though this is obviously not the case. Those who fight for power demand that others respect their needs and rights, even if they themselves are not willing to do so. Those who are in power must help those who are not – for moral reasons.

150 years ago, Nietzsche analyzed the resentment mechanisms by which the weak gain power over the strong by morally exploiting their role as victims. He clearly saw that social conflicts are not about questions of truth, the good or justice, but a power struggle waged under a moral guise. Most of our social debates over the last 50 years have been conducted in this way: liberation activists, feminists, critics of colonialism and nationalism, proponents of universalism and cosmopolitanism and their opponents have all practiced the mechanisms analyzed by Nietzsche, and they have been pretty successful in doing so.

3. Identity Politics

In order to create more just conditions for everybody, democratic countries around the globe pursue and implement policies that promote greater self-determination, cultural participation and political power for marginalized groups in order to help them assert their distinctiveness and gain recognition in contexts of inequality or injustice. But they often do it without due regard for the interests and potentials of society at large, or the different needs of others, or the commonalities we must share for our society to work. Identity politics that seek to overcome structures of inequality and injustice for marginalized groups in society thus often create new injustices and inequalities. Like the sorcerer's apprentice, we have inaugurated a global process of social change but cannot control the forces that drive us apart or prevent the weakening of the forces that bind us together. As Fukuyama has recently shown, if we take identity politics to the extreme, we end up in a destructive individualism and group

egoism that undermine the structures and procedures of democratic societies, social welfare and republican representationalism.[2]

The tensions between centripetal and centrifugal forces in society can be observed everywhere, and they have been fueled by the global spread of capitalism and consumerism. For some, freedom, independence, and autonomy are the highest values in our society that must not be compromised by any social commitments, legal restrictions, or political obligations. Others emphasize justice, equity and equality and insist that we must practice solidarity with those who need it and assume responsibility even for that for which we are not responsible.

But why play off one against the other? Is it true that insistence on autonomy and diversity weakens social cohesion, or that striving for justice, equity and equality undermines individual freedom? How much individuality and which kinds of diversity are we ready to accept? Where do we want draw a line, if we do, and for which reasons? How much autonomy and diversity are possible without destroying social cohesion and human solidarity? And how much social commonality is necessary to be able to live an autonomous life and do justice to diversity?

We all know that the Enlightenment's call to overcome traditional dependencies and prejudices through self-determined autonomy has been understood very differently. Some see it as a license to make their individual interests and desires the yardstick of their lives, and not always for bad reasons. Others follow a more Kantian line by focusing on an autonomy that does not center on one's own desires, wishes and dreams, but on the duty to universalize the maxim of the good will. They believe that the only way to make the world a better place is to better oneself; and the only way to better oneself is to will nothing that cannot be willed by everyone in the given situation, and to create legal and political institutions that allow people of different moral, political and religious persuasions to live together peacefully.

This goes beyond the Hegelian idea that we must recognize and acknowledge ourselves in the other, or the Levinasian insight that it is the other who, by her mere presence, demands our moral solidarity. All this remains dangerously vague and indeterminate if it is not transformed into legal and political institutions which, by defining the rights and duties of every person, guarantee equal treatment of others *as others*. It is not because we are ultimately all equal that we must strive for something common. Instead, it is because we are all unequal and different that we need common, binding structures and institutions that enable us to live together in peace.

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[2] M. Lilla, "Identitätspolitik ist keine Politik," *NZZ*, November 26 (2016) (https://www.nzz.ch/feuilleton/mark-lilla-ueber-die-krise-des-linksliberalismus-identitaetspolitik-ist-keine-politik-ld.130695?reduced=true) (7/13/2022); F. Fukuyama, *Identity: The Demand for Dignity and the Politics of Resentment* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Girouxd, 2018).

4. The Importance of the Common

In order not to fall from autonomous subjectivity into egoistic subjectivism and essentialist tribalism[3] that makes our diversity and individuality a plague for all, we must constantly search for commonalities that enable us to live together without denying our differences and diversity – as people, as citizens, as parents and children, as students and teachers. Without at least a minimal consensus on common orientations in our different spheres of life, we cannot even fight for an improvement of the asymmetrical distribution of goods in our world or develop a common mind about the social and cultural distortions that need to be overcome. If everyone only represents their own interests, soon no one will be able to do so, and we are in the state which Hobbes described as "the war of all against all" (*bellum omnium against omnes*) "when every man is enemy to every man" that comes with "continual fear and danger of violent death" and makes "the life of man solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short."[4]

It is important to be aware of what is at stake here. If we believe that "'Good' and 'evil' are names that [only] signify our desires and aversions, which are different in men who differ in their characters, customs, and beliefs",[5] then we are on the direct path to social self-destruction. What is good – good *for me*, *for you*, *for them* – must not separate us from one other but must make us better together. Only what can be freely shared by others is truly a common good, and only standing up for a good that implies the same duties and rights for all is true autonomy, true self-determination for the good, and not just a selfish struggle for a greater share of power. We are not free when we are driven by our interests, wants and desires. We are not free when we oppose those who oppose us. We merely fall prey to the dialectics of power and remain determined by what we oppose. In order to be free, we must move beyond this opposition, and we do so when we freely bind ourselves to the good that we share with others.

But we must do it voluntarily, not because we are forced to do it or because we are classified as members of a group, tradition, nation, or religion on the basis of external characteristics beyond our control. We all have multiple identities, and not all of them apply in all situations. We all belong in larger con-

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[3] Cf. S. Hanson-Easey, M. Augoustoinos and G. Molony, "'They're All Tribals:' Essentialism, Context and the Discursive Representation of Sudanese Refugees," *Discourse & Society* 25 (2016): 362–382 (https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0957926513519536) (7/13/2022); K. Mashininga, "Is the university quota system discriminatory?" (https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20191203045249423) (7/13/2022).

[4] T. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Pt. 1, chap. 12 (https://www.earlymoderntexts.com/assets/pdfs/hobbes1651part1.pdf) (7/13/2022).

[5] Ibid., chap. 15 (https://www.earlymoderntexts.com/assets/pdfs/hobbes1651part1.pdf) (7/13/2022).

texts defined by gender, race, culture or religion. But to regard a person not as an inviolable bearer of human dignity and autonomy but merely or primarily as a member of a group, and to define membership in that group racially, religiously or gender specifically, can itself be a form of racism, religious bias, and sexism. What matters is not this belonging, but how we and others relate to it, whether we make it a question of our identity or not. We don't have to. If we do so, we will soon realize that we are thereby reinforcing the divisions that we want to overcome.[6] To see others as mere representatives of an ideologically defined group, without considering how they see themselves or how they want to be seen by us, poisons the way we treat each other, undermines social cohesion, and leads to the struggle of all against all.

5. Not Only a Token of a Type

The problem is currently particularly acute at universities in the USA.[7] If you want to get an academic job at a university like Claremont Graduate University (CGU), you must show yourself to be "committed to justice, equity, diversity and inclusion, both in the classroom and in larger contexts," by writing a diversity statement that demonstrates your "commitment to embracing diversity and supporting inclusion and equity in education," teaching and research.[8] Open-

[6] Cf. S. Kostner, "Wer sich als Opfer darstellt, hat es auf Macht abgesehen. Und wer sich schuldig bekennt, will moralische Läuterung: So funktioniert die neue gesellschaftliche Dynamik," *NZZ*, September 30 (2019); *Identitätslinke Läuterungsagenda. Eine Debatte zu ihren Folgen für Migrationsgesellschaften* (Stuttgart: ibidem, 2019); R. Scheu, "Interview," *NZZ*, November 24 (2020) (https://www.nzz.ch/feuilleton/wir-gegen-die-mentalitaet-opferansprueche-und-schuldbekenntnisse-ld.1511319) (7/13/2022).

[7] S. Ben-Porath, "Free Speech at the University: A Way Forward," *University World News*, November 2 (2019) (https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20191029104513847) (7/13/2022); F. Coulmas, "Wozu sind Universitäten da? – Für Erkenntnis und Wissen und nicht für den Kult der Diversity," *NZZ*, June 26 (2019) (https://www.nzz.ch/meinung/wozu-sind-universitaeten-da-nicht-fuer-den-kult-der-diversity-ld.1489464) (7/13/2022); I. U. Dalferth, "Orientierungslos im Meer der Ideologien," *FAZ*, Nr. 169, July 23 (2020): 6 (https://www.faz.net/aktuell/karriere-hochschule/hoersaal/lage-der-geisteswissenschaften"-orientierungslos-im-meer-der-ideologien-16872082.html) (7/13/2022); "Großprojekt Gegendiskriminierung. Kritische Anmerkungen zur Entwicklung der Universitäten in den USA in Sachen Identitätspolitik," *Zeitzeichen* 22 (2021): 8–11 (https://zeitzeichen.net/node/8764) (7/13/2022); "Kaninchen hervorgezaubert. Eine Replik auf 'Fetisch Gegendiskriminierung'," *Zeitzeichen* 22 (2021) (https://zeitzeichen.net/node/8918) (7/13/2022); H. Pluckrose and J. Lindsay, *Cynical Theories: How Universities Made Everything about Race, Gender, and Identity – And Why This Harms Everybody* (Durham, NC: Pitchstone Publishing, 2020).

[8] To provide just one example from an invitation to a *Preparing Future Faculty Webinar* about the "Basics of Diversity Statements" on June 30, 2022 at CGU: "A diversity statement is a valuable tool when you practice teaching, research, leadership, and most other endeavors.

ness to diversity is the new key competence,[9] and the ability to write a diversity statement is an essential requirement for anyone applying for a position at the university. Of course, universities need to address the ethnic and cultural diversity of the country in which it is located. There are glaring injustices that are deeply rooted in history and experienced by many on a daily basis. These must be named, exposed, and remedied wherever possible. But there is no representative justice for individuals. No woman is better off if another woman gets a job, and no minority student is better off if another student of that group gets a place at university. Moreover, academia is not politics, and the duties and responsibilities of universities are not those of the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government. It's one thing to uncover problems, back them up with facts, work on models for solutions, and critically discuss the values that guide them. It is quite another thing when values are not only propagated but made binding and cast by administrations into rules that cannot be followed without discriminating against entire arbitrarily defined groups of people.[10] In many places in the US universities and curricula are being purged of people, words, ideas, and issues that represent everything that is

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Writing a diversity statement is an opportunity to narrate your journey as a teacher, scholar, and leader and articulate your values, beliefs, goals, and methods as an educator committed to justice, equity, diversity and inclusion, both in the classroom and in larger contexts. This session will highlight important considerations in writing your diversity statement no matter what stage you are in. During this webinar, you will learn: 1. What to include in your Diversity Statements. 2. How to integrate Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI) in your statement. 3. How to communicate your experiences and commitment to embracing diversity and supporting inclusion and equity in education. 4. How to get more help developing your own Diversity Statements."

[9] "CGU locates diversity as an essential component of its institutional mission. To attract the best and the brightest, to solve humanity's most pressing problems, to foster a community of life-long learners who make a difference in the world, Claremont Graduate University is committed to the inherent value of diversity. CGU is advancing diversity and equity in higher education, and with a higher representation of domestic students of color than the national average, our student body affirms it." (https://www.cgu.edu/student-life/diversity/) (7/13/2022).

[10] One does not shrink from self-contradictory formulations, because they allow the administration to decide at will: "CGU is an Equal Opportunity Employer and does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, creed, national origin, sex, age, sexual orientation, or physical disability in its employment practice and in admission of students to educational programs and activities in accordance with the requirement of Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 and other applicable laws. CGU is committed to affirmative action in employment practices regarding ethnic minorities, the physically challenged, Vietnamera veterans, and women" (https://www.cgu.edu/employment-opportunities/) (7/13/2022). The tension between the dual commitment to nondiscrimination and affirmative action for some and against other groups is either not noticed or intentionally ignored. The fight against discrimination at universities has long since become a major project of counter-discrimination through affirmative action, quota regulations and diversity management. It is considered morally justified to discriminate against the discriminators, because it is about good discrimination. Cf. I. X. Kendi, *How to Be An Antiracist* (New York: One World, 2019).

white, male, and heterosexual.[11] Those who do not make a diversity statement that meets the expectations the university has defined will not even be considered for application. Historically significant works of the European traditions are removed from the teaching canon because they were written by "white heterosexual men." Critical questioning of different positions is challenged as Western thinking and as an academic perpetuation of colonialism and replaced by a declaration of commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. The motivation is understandable, the goal may be well-intentioned, but the means are ineffective, and the result is devastating. To quote just one observer of recent developments at universities:

> Isn't it also racist or sexist to exclude 'whiteness and heterosexuality'? Diversity supporters say: No. Because the majority, or the group that represents power, cannot be discriminated against. But is that true? No. To discriminate means to discriminate to the disadvantage of a group – whether that group is in the majority or in the minority is irrelevant.
>
> Today, diversity is enforced by systematically excluding what has long since ceased to be the majority power at Ivy League institutions: the white, fearfully respected professor who constantly glances at young female students or embarrasses them with lewd remarks. Thus, diversity becomes a conformism of mind aimed at the male. And a doctrine that enables racism and sexism all the more, simply in the other direction. For the group that is to be excluded is no longer named at all – only those who must not be discriminated against under any circumstances are named. Does power become more bearable when it comes in the guise of diversity? [...]
>
> Where is the error in thinking? In the fact that in the final analysis it is not about tolerance, nor only about racism or sexism in rainbow garb. It is about the claim to want to be minority and majority at the same time, subject and sovereign of power at the same time. It is about the lie of not identifying with the power that belongs to the adherents of a rigid but ultimately inconsistent identity politics.[12]

Where identity issues take over, the pursuit of insight and truth is reduced to a power struggle between groups. But for universities, this is self-destructive. They must undoubtedly meet the challenges of society's growing ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity. And they must be sensitive to the historical injustices that still affect members of certain groups today. But favoring some members of one group does not create justice for the others. And it is not a viable path to consider all groups and orientations equally.

Each semester, all faculty at CGU are informed of the Interfaith Calendar, which lists all religious festivals and holidays that may be relevant to students and should be considered when planning courses and exams. There is

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[11] Cf. R. DiAngelo, *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism* (London: Penguin, 2019).

[12] S. Pines, "Diversity an US-Universitäten: Wenn Antirassismus zu Rassismus wird," *NZZ*, April 4 (2019) (https://www.nzz.ch/feuilleton/diversity-an-us-unis-wenn-antirassismus-zu-rassismus-wird-ld.1472150) (7/13/2022).

hardly a day in the semester that is not affected. The list includes not only religions such as "Judaism, Islam, Buddhist, Hindu, Christian, Baha'i, Zoroastrian, Sikh, Shinto, Jain, Confucian, Daoist, Native American, Materialism, Secular Humanism," but also Mandaeans, Yezidi, Kemetic Federation, Wicca, Scientology, Caodai, Society of Humankind, Eckankar, Theosophy, New Age, Temple Zagduku, Qigong/T'ai chi, Raelian Church, Asatru, Hellenismos, Yoruba, Rastafari, Unitarian Universalist. And recently, the Church of Satan and the Pastafarians (The Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster) have also been legally included in the "family of religions." The university's effort to give equal weight to all is obviously becoming a farce. One hopes that the problem will not arise in practice. The appeal to reasons of equity, equality and justice only conceals the fact that one does not know what to do.

The effort to do justice to all raises more than just organizational problems. Universities should not only not discriminate against anyone, but also take into account the concerns of different identity groups in research and teaching. This is increasingly leading to a move away from the universalizing Western culture of scholarship and science. The simplest solution is to stop engaging with it. European thinking and white men's science should no longer define the field; the culturally and socially marginalized claim the right to do scholarship and science as they wish in their own name. This opens up interesting perspectives that raise new and important questions. But taken by itself, it is not a path that leads beyond the differences of the various groups, but rather one that reinforces them. No one knows how to deal constructively with the ever-increasing diversity of methods, content, and group interests. If there were infinite resources, it might be possible to avoid conflicts. But there are not. Therefore, there is a struggle for the available resources, funds, and positions, and academia becomes the battleground of groups and their ideologies.

What is often deliberately overlooked is that, despite all the necessary criticism, it is precisely the European tradition with its emphasis on freedom, equality, justice, and solidarity that has found a way out of the religious, cultural, and national group conflicts in Europe. A better solution has not yet been proposed anywhere.[13] Therefore, in this volume we will link the debate about diversity to the debates about autonomy and the common good. One must go back into history to understand the present. And a central point in this history is the attempt of Enlightenment thinkers in Europe to find a way out of the group dependencies and the resulting conflicts that had brought Europe

[13] One can and must read the point of Alexander Pope's "Know then thyself, presume not God to scan, // The proper study of mankind is Man" also in that way. A. Pope, *An Essay On Man: Being the First Book of Ethic Epistles. To Henry St. John, L. Bolingbroke* (London: John Wright, 1734), Epistle II, 1–2 (https://www.eighteenthcenturypoetry.org/works/o3676-w0010.shtml) (7/13/2022).

to the brink of the abyss in the 16th and 17th centuries. The often-criticized European individualism and universalism, rightly understood, is not the problem, but the solution to the problems of diversity, group conflict and the struggle for recognition.

6. The Difficulty of Becoming a Self

Kant – to name only him – saw the decisive step toward liberation from attachment to traditional opinions, groups, and identities in becoming a responsible self or subject through critical self-thinking and moral self-determination. His concern is misunderstood if it is understood as an "expansion of the subject zone, i. e., the demand for self-disposal and self-determination as a characteristic of," and if "the promise of modernity" is seen in the right "to make use not only of one's own intellect, but also of one's own body."[14] To make oneself the means of one's own arbitrariness is the opposite of the autonomy of which Kant speaks, and to interpret this as a subject's free self-disposal over itself, to which no one else would have the right to object, turns Kant's concept of the self-responsible subject into a romanticizing arbitrary subjectivism, which is the opposite of what Kant was concerned with. To be able to act in this way, one would first have to be a subject, and if one is a subject in Kant's sense, aligning oneself with the maxim of the good, thinking for oneself, judging rationally, and acting responsibly, then one no longer acts in this arbitrary and selfish way.

But how do we become subjects who think and judge for themselves? Not by turning away from others and doing only what we want. We are not abstract individuals who have no obligations to others, but we are concrete individuals with identities that we share to varying degrees with others – not all with all others, but many with some, and not always equally, but each in a certain way. Being a human being is a fact that no one can deny, becoming a self is a task and a duty that everyone can avoid. We are all born as human beings without having contributed anything. We are there without being the cause of it ourselves. We all have a lot in common that comes with our intersecting identities. But while we are all human beings from birth and thus share in the rights and duties that we associate with the dignity of being human, no one is therefore already a self, but must first become one in the course of his or her life. This happens by not only being what we are, but by relating to it in a distinctive way by living it concretely. Since everyone does this in his or her own way,

[14] P.-I. Villa Braslavsky, "Trans* Personen nehmen das Versprechen der Moderne ernst," *Die Zeit Online*, June 25, 2022 (https://www.zeit.de/kultur/2022-06/paula-irene-villa-braslavsky-trans-gender-soziologie) (26/06/2022) (my translation).

everyone is not just a token of a type, an individual case of the human being like everyone else, but a concrete human individual different from all others.

In short, every human being is a human being from birth, but every human being must first become a responsible self. One becomes it by relating to one's Dasein and humanity by living here and now in a unique and concrete way shared with nobody else. Everyone lives their own life and no other, and in each life it becomes apparent whether and how one goes from being a human being like everyone else to a self that is none other than oneself. Self-becoming is always a process and never a *fait accompli*; one is a self only by becoming it, and one becomes it only by moving from the humanity that one shares with others to a way of living one's humanity that one doesn't share with anyone.

7. *Idem*-Identity and *Ipse*-Identity

This makes it necessary to differentiate the concept of identity. 'Identity' comes from the Latin word *idem* and that means: the same. But this sameness is seen differently by others than by myself. Paul Ricoeur speaks of *idem*-identity in the first sense, but *ipse*-identity in the second.[15] I am the same in the sense of *idem* because of the characteristics by which I can be identified as the same by others in different situations. I am the same in the sense of *ipse* because of the way I see and identify myself. The two ways of seeing my identity are not to be confused. The first says who I am to others, the second who I am to myself. But I see myself as different from others, even though I refer to the same characteristics. Other-identification as *idem* on the basis of characteristics that I exhibit and that are attributed to me is one thing; self-identification as *ipse* is another, because it always involves a self-relation to the characteristics of *idem*-identifications. Only by choosing oneself does one become an *ipse*. Only by being an *idem* can one become an *ipse*. But no one becomes an *ipse* just because one is an *idem*. Only those who exist can be identified as *idem* and identify themselves as *ipse*. *Idem*-identifications are oriented to features that are also accessible to others, i. e., can be specified in the third-person perspective; *ipse*-identity, on the other hand, is tied to the first-person perspective and always involves a distancing from the *idem*-identity ascribed to me: I am different from what you think, and not only as you see me.

Why is this distinction important? Because it is based on experience-based simplifications that we need in potentially dangerous situations to be able to decide quickly. We need to pay attention to salient features with high sensory discriminatory power (sight, hearing, touch, smell, taste) in order to orient ourselves quickly and behave appropriately. And we must distinguish ourselves

[15] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 2, 118. passim.

from the situation and all its features in order to remain capable of acting within it. The first requirement leads to the formation of *idem*-identities, the second to the formation of *ipse*-identities.

The *ipse*-identity cannot be derived in any way from an *idem*-identity. It is not a sum of traits or data that defines us, but a result of how we relate to those traits and data by concretely existing and living in certain ways. We need both identities in order to be human beings not only in the third-person perspective (i. e., the sum of the qualities we associate with the term 'human'), but to become a responsibly acting self in the first-person perspective (i. e., a reality to which these qualities can not only be truthfully ascribed, but which makes these qualities its own in a distinctive choice and manner): We are human beings (and nothing else) by birth, but we become a self (this person and no other) by the way we concretely live and exist.

Idem-identities are constructed by externally recognizable characteristics that define us and others as cases of something general: people, women, men, migrants, police officers, students, etc. The assignment of people to these generalities is not rigid and can go wrong, but this does not absolve us from the need to work with such assignments in social interaction.[16] In every society and culture, however, this everyday orientation practice leads to a phenomenon that is currently being discussed particularly intensively: Orienting distinctions based on external characteristics become cultural stereotypes that function in a completely different way. Skin color, gender, language, appearance, etc. no longer serve merely to provide quick orientation in social situations on the basis of easily recognizable external features, but become identity ascriptions that link two processes: They assign people to groups whose characteristic identity is solidified into stereotypes, and they create fictional identities or "Lies That Bind" (Appiah) through this, because they ascribe the stereotypical identity characteristics of the group to everyone who belongs to that group. One is then no longer dealing with José, but with a Mexican, and because Mexicans are macho, this is also imputed to José.

Kwame Anthony Appiah has described these processes in a differentiated way in his studies on the problem of identity, focusing primarily on the stereotyping of creed, country, color, class, and culture.[17] In all these cases, two problems arise. On the one hand, there are processes of abstraction from the concrete situations of interaction and thus the perceptible characteristics become signs of group membership. Concrete people are no longer perceived on the basis of certain characteristics, but as members of a group – as Jews, Muslims or Christians, as Iraqis, Nigerians or Chinese, as Blacks, Caucasians or

[16] See I. U. Dalferth, "Alle nur 'Copien von Andern'? Plädoyer für eine differenziertere Identitätsdebatte im Demokratiediskurs" (in print).

[17] K. A. Appiah, *The Lies That Bind: Rethinking Identity* (New York: Liveright, 2018).

Asians, as Westerners or Africans, Native Americans or colonialists, as women or men, as both or neither. The stereotypical characteristics of these groups are blanketly applied to every member of the group. One is no longer this or that person, but Muslim or Christian, Asian or African, indigenous or colonialist, woman or man. The focus is not on the individual, but on his or her group membership. And as one characterizes the respective group, one also judges those who are assigned to it. Chinese are hard-working, Africans lazy, women oppressed and men macho.

On the other hand, it lays the foundation for never-ending social and political conflicts. Groups always define themselves by demarcation from other groups. Belonging to one group therefore usually excludes belonging to other groups against which one's own group demarcates itself. It is true that because of one's complex identity, one can be assigned to different groups at the same time and accordingly be stereotypically judged and condemned not only once but several times. The debate around intersectionality, that is, the intersection of different categories of discrimination against one person, has made this particularly concrete for victim and perpetrator groups. Black lesbian women are triply discriminated against, and old white men are perpetrators in more than one way. But this does not call into question that the groups to which one is so assigned are each distinctly different from others. Blacks are not whites, Muslims are not Christians, women are not men. And because these distinctions that are often binary always lead to difficulties with regard to concrete individual cases – not everyone is clearly either one or the other, but some are more one thing and less the other – there is often a fierce dispute about these group stereotypings.

At the level of stereotypical group identities, things often look clearer than at the level of individual people. While on the level of individuals everyone is equal in that they are different from everyone else, and on the level of society as a whole everyone is equal in that everyone belongs to it just as much as everyone else, on the complex intermediate level of groups and groupings it is not equality but difference that dominates. Group identity is always constituted by demarcation, belonging to one group is always constituted by not belonging to other groups. The boundaries may be sharper or less sharply drawn. But they are there, and they cannot be dissolved. This is a core problem of identity politics.

8. Against Thinking in Collectives

Identity politics is political action oriented toward the needs of a particular group of people and aimed at strengthening their social recognition and political influence. In democratic systems, individuals can achieve little politically.

Politics needs majorities, and majorities do not exist without group formation. This is clearly evident in the struggle for recognition and participation. Groupings in identity politics are usually based on *idem*-identities, even if the actors themselves act according to their own *ipse*-identities. They have identified with certain aspects of their identity in such a way that they make them the guiding principles of their politics for all those who also exhibit these aspects – whether they identify with them or not.

It is of crucial importance whether the *idem*-identity or the *ipse*-identity is central in identity formation. In the first case, one is assigned to groups one has not chosen oneself on the basis of one's external characteristics; in the second case, one chooses groups with which one identifies. The second is an important step on the way to becoming a responsible and self-determined self or an *ipse*. But no one is just an individual self, everyone is also a case of often multiple generalities: a human being, a family member, a citizen, an opera lover, etc. This results in complex identities to which one must consciously relate in order not to be unconsciously determined by them. This is an art that has to be learned and practiced, because otherwise the Enlightenment project of becoming a self stalls and one does not become an *ipse*, but remains an *idem*. The former, on the other hand, leads to structures in which all are only "copies of others," as Kant said, because one's own identity is based on the characteristics that define the group. But this is the opposite of becoming a self, the opposite of self-determination, without which there is no becoming a self, and the opposite of the Enlightenment project that one pretends to continue. One does not show people the way to maturity if one does not treat them as self-responsible selves but as immature members of collectives, i. e., if one identifies them only as the same (*idem*) in different situations and does not take them seriously as selves (*ipse*) in every situation.

Identity politics pretends to do so, but it fails to do so precisely because it shifts the focus from individuals to groups or collectives. The fundamental rights of the individual vis-à-vis the state are turned into their opposite when they are redefined as rights of groups vis-à-vis other groups. This forces people to identify with their group and thus implicitly or explicitly differentiate themselves from other groups. And it no longer allows for the freedom to think, talk and act differently from the group. The idea that the party is always right is well known from authoritarian regimes. It doesn't get any better if you assume that the group is always right.

The problematic of individual and collective identity formations, the demarcation against others, the exclusion of others and the pathologization of the non-identical, has been known for a long time. But in recent years, the dream of a colorful and relaxed multiculturalism under the rainbow flag has disintegrated into an increasingly sharp opposition between left and right identity politics and left and right racism. Along the lines of gender, postcolonial-

ism, diversity, and racism, people argue with increasing aggressiveness about sexual, gender, ethnic, and cultural identities without even asking, let alone answering, the question of a minimal basis of commonality. The mere attempt to ask this question is considered sufficient reason to be outraged by disrespect and non-respect.[18]

But the dream of a peaceful coexistence of the various identity groups fails in the face of reality. The world is as it is, not as we would like it to be. As long as we do not have unlimited resources, the effort to participate is always a struggle for participation. In this struggle, as in every struggle, there are winners and losers. When resources are scarce, the struggle for participation is never just a struggle of those who do not have against those who do have, but always also a struggle against others who struggle for participation. If everyone is fighting for the same thing, but not everyone can have it in the same way, then everyone is always fighting against each other. If the only common thing is the struggle for one's own identity, then there are no more defensible differences, but only competing group interests. This is one of the self-destructive mechanisms of identity-political power struggles, which amount to the struggle of all against all if reason does not reassert itself in time.

9. The Destruction of the Enlightenment Project

The past decades have made it abundantly clear that the enlightenment project of becoming oneself is not promoted but hindered by the identity-guided change of focus from the individual to groups. Where the struggle of identities is primarily or only about group identities, which all define themselves against each other, a society atomizes and disintegrates into groups and small groups. One no longer strives for the general, the common, the normal, the average, but for one's own, the deviant, the non-normal, the incomparable. Since this can only be done by constantly making it an issue, the result is a never-ending competition for attention, recognition, and support. Everyone fights for themselves, their own group, and their identity. But where everyone is only concerned with their own identity, being radically different is the only thing one shares with others. No reasonably stable order can be established on this basis. A society of mutually exclusive identity groups can turn into a mob at any time, as the storming of the Capitol on January 6, 2021 in Washington D.C. showed. The path of becoming a self by becoming absorbed in group identities is therefore an erroneous path. But what could it look like then?

The answer can only be: It cannot succeed on the way of an ever more precise determination of one's *idem*-identity, but only on the way of strengthening

[18] M. Lilla, *The Once and Future Liberal. After Identity Politics* (London: Harper, 2017).

one's *ipse*-identity. But the core of *ipse*-identity is not that one shares a certain set of characteristics with a group, but that one is able to distance oneself from all the characteristics one shares with others. It is not the detailed extension of the third-person *idem*-perspective as a complex intersectional group membership that continues the Enlightenment project of becoming a self, but rather the decisive turn to the first-person *ipse*-perspective. One does not become a self by acknowledging one's multiple group memberships, but by being critical and discriminating about those memberships, saying yes to some of them and no to others. Becoming a self depends on how one relates to oneself, accepting some characteristics one shares with others and rejecting others. It is a matter of becoming a self in the first person, not a judgment of others about me in the third person. I become an *ipse* only by concretely existing my identity in real life, even though this may appear to others to be only a specification of my *idem*-identity. Thus, the *ipse* always has an existential surplus over the *idem*. It is an existential reality and not only an experiential phenomenon for others. No intersectional determination of an *idem*-identity, no matter how differentiated, can make it an *ipse*-identity.

10. From Copies of Others to Selves

But how can this be built up? Here the theological tradition offers resources that deserve to be taken much more seriously than is often the case. Just think of what Kierkegaard had emphasized in the 19th century in his argument with Hegel. He pointed out that becoming a self can be conceived neither as an autonomous self-creation nor as participation in a conceptually increasingly well-defined set of shared characteristics. These are, according to Kierkegaard, only conceptual movements in the mode of the possible, but not realities in the mode of the actual. No one can bring oneself into existence, but only someone who is not only possible but actually exists can become a self. Every becoming of a self must therefore do justice to the deep passivity that characterizes every existence. Any attempt to think of the becoming of a self through something common, in which all participate in their own way, fails because what is understood as common is always shaped and determined by the interests of those who formulate it. One does not become the self by copying others. Those who think that we must all agree on a common understanding of what it means to be human in order to live in a truly human way are mistaken, for such an understanding is always contaminated by the interests of those who propose it and manifests the asymmetrical power relations in a society and culture. And those who think we must all aspire to a particular group identity in order to become a distinct self are also mistaken, for that will never take us beyond the differences of our respective groups.

If you want to get beyond that, you have to become an individual, and you only become an individual when you switch from the *idem* mode to the *ipse* mode and become a you in the same sense as everybody else. *Idem*-determinations are built on demarcations from others because nothing can be determined without distinguishing it from something else (*omnis determinatio est negatio*, as Leibniz said). *Ipse*-determinations, on the other hand, do not describe, but localize or anchor in real life. They do not say 'x is F,' but 'I am F,' and 'I' here does not function like a name or a concept, but like an index term that locates or anchors a particular state of affairs in the here and now of actual life. It is from this concrete anchoring in a concrete life that the *ipse*-identity and thus the self develops. If this takes place in the mode of the first person (I vs. others), the result is an egoistic self, if takes place in the mode of a radically understood second person (you vs. you), a true self can develop. What does this mean?

Whoever refers to others only as I, constructs them and himself always only from his own perspective, thus does not perceive the others in their otherness and strangeness. On the other hand, the one who relates as you to another I perceives himself as he is addressed or treated by the other. This only ever leads to a sameness that is limited by deeper differences between me and the others. This is different only where one is related as a you to another you, because then no one has anything ahead of the other and cannot position his identity against the identity of the other. In order to be related as you to a you, however, a third party is needed, from which I and the other are constituted as you, before we mutually determine ourselves as I and other. Only through this third party, through which I and the other become you in the same way, true sameness or equality is given; in all our processes of determination and behavior, on the other hand, difference will dominate.

Whoever really wants to become an individual and not only remain a particular case of something general among others, must therefore understand themselves as a you from this third. Kierkegaard calls this third the "middle term," which never appears in experience, but without which nothing could appear and no one could act as you or I or we or you. Only those who understand themselves from this third as a you, become really a self, that is to say, someone who is not only a "copy of others," but also does not only determine others from his own perspective or thinks that he can bring himself into existence, but is the neighbor of the third who also makes every other human being his neighbor and thus all human beings neighbors of his neighbors. In this sense, true ipse identity consists in being a you and treating all others also as you in the same sense – as you of the one who makes everyone his neighbor, me no different from anyone else, thus creating radical, unqualified sameness and equality. Everyone is different from everyone else, but all are completely equal before God.

Thus, fundamental sameness or equality is grounded in God alone, while radical diversity characterizes creation. In it, sameness always exists only for

some who are demarcated against others. Any attempt to establish equality and justice in the *idem*-perspective will therefore only create other inequalities. Only in the *ipse*-perspective can there be radical sameness in creation, when everyone is able to distance themselves from their own identities, because they can understand, recognize, and accept themselves as God's neighbor like everyone else, and hence relate to everybody as God's neighbor to a neighbor of God.[19]

11. The Common Good in Pluralistic Societies

None of our societies is as just as we would like it to be. Each is poisoned and distorted by the effects of past failures, faults, and crimes. There are always social, geographical and historical inequalities, injuries, and frustrations between people that need to be overcome. A society has to find ways to cope with them. But there is much that we cannot undo, and it is a fine line that separates the right from the wrong way to deal with this troublesome legacy.

Everyone can learn from history that fighting evil through evil has never done any good. Attempts to overcome inequality, injustice or discrimination through reverse discrimination, inequality or injustice reinforce what they seek to overcome. We undermine the moral legitimacy of the goals we fight for when we do so with means that contradict the desired goal.

Orienting oneself towards the common good therefore does not only mean being clear about the goals that one wants to achieve together, but also trying to find ways to achieve these goals that do not contradict what one is trying to achieve. A long tradition has seen the common good as the social order in which individuals and groups can best strive for perfection. Liberal societies insist that this perfecting must not be done at the cost of others or by restricting the right to such a striving only to some and not granting it also to others. But what does 'perfection' mean today? And what has become of the common good in our time? Is the orientation towards a commonality that is defined by some (by those in power, by Westerners, Europeans, old white men, #communities, self-appointed cultural avantgards) really something to strive for? Can something be a common good for us if we are not among those who define it? There are significant differences between conceptions of the common good in the West and East, between those in power and those striving for power, and between secular and religious interpretations of the human pursuit of happiness and fulfilled life.[20] Nothing here is obvious, and nothing is non-controversial.

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[19] See I. U. Dalferth, *Die Krise der öffentlichen Vernunft. Über Demokratie, Urteilskraft und Gott* (Leipzig: EVA, 2022), chap. 5.

[20] M. J. Sandel, *The Tyranny of Merit. What's Become of the Common Good?* (London: Penguin, 2020).

But can we do without orientation towards the common good in one form or another, or do we not at least have to have a debate about it? And can we have such a debate without a language that is not constrained by political and moral guidelines?

As Žižek pointed out 20 years ago: In Western liberal democracies, you can "[s]ay and write whatever you like – on condition that you do not actually question or disturb the prevailing political consensus."[21] If you do that, you have to bear the consequences. This is no less true today than it was then, and it highlights the difficulty of determining the common good in pluralistic societies. Even the debate about it is full of pitfalls and a battlefield of interests. One does not only fight about the issue, but already about the language in which one could argue about this issue.

12. Challenges to the Idea of the Common Good

All this must be kept in mind in discussions of the common good today. Let me highlight three problems in particular.

First, it is clearly not enough to formulate the idea of a common good only in negative terms by pointing out what we do not have in common with others: If all we share is that we all want to be different from the others, our society will become dysfunctional.

Second, it is also not enough to define the common good positively as a set of moral values to which all must subscribe. To expect everyone to follow the same values is not very realistic, and it contradicts our autonomy in matters of life orientation if we are asked to subscribe to a list of values that we ourselves have not freely chosen. On the contrary, what we need is a framework of legal rights and duties that enable people with different value orientations to live together peacefully. One must have the right to be different. Only conceptions of the common good that take this into account will be acceptable.

Third, however, there is a further problem, perhaps the most difficult of all. Our ideas of the common good express what our societies care about. But these concerns are different in different societies, not just superficially, but deep down. There is no society in which – for good historical reasons – there are no taboos that define boundaries that must not be crossed. The wound of the Shoah in Germany, the shame of racism in the US, the fear of universalist ideas in China or the legacy of colonialism in the Latin Americas permeate every formulation of the common good in these countries. These taboos define what can be said and what cannot be said, but they define different boundaries in each case.

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[21] S. Žižek, "Afterword. Lenin's Choice," in *Revolution at the Gates. A Selection of Writings of Lenin from February to October 1917*, ed. S. Žižek (London: Verso, 2002), 167.

This is the source of much misunderstanding. We all expect others to respect our taboos as well. This is often experienced by others as moral imperialism because their moral sensibilities are not ours and vice versa. But if a concept of the common good can only be convincing if it reflects the taboos of a society, and if different societies have different taboos for historical reasons, a global consensus on what is good for everyone seems to be a chimera. Can we even discuss the problem meaningfully without taking cultural, religious, historical differences into account? Wouldn't it often be better to focus on defensible differences rather than fighting about the common good? How can we create an atmosphere in which the differences, deficiencies and deficits of our societies can be discussed openly, concretely, fairly, and accurately? Can religious traditions contribute to this? How do they configure the ideas of autonomy, diversity, and the common good? Do they have anything to offer that goes beyond secular conceptions? If so, is what they offer compatible with secular views? Or must we depart from the idea of the common good and seek alternatives that would allow us to better hold together the diverging forces of autonomy, individuality, and diversity on the one hand and the binding forces of social justice, equality, solidarity, and responsibility on the other?

There is no straightforward positive or negative answer to most of those questions, as we shall see. Autonomy and diversity have always been controversial issues, and so have been the views about what we should, must or do share in order to live a good human life together with others – other human beings and other fellow creatures.

13. The Structure of the Volume

The volume is organized in two parts. Part I discusses contributions to the theme of autonomy and the common good from a variety of philosophical and theological perspectives that address fundamental questions to be considered in discussions of these issues. Part II explores key ethical and political issues that arise in the pursuit of diversity, equality, and justice in various theological traditions. The contemporary situation is inescapably plural and diverse, which cannot be ignored when discussing issues of diversity. Thus, both parts take up issues from different cultural perspectives, without whose consideration the problems discussed today cannot be adequately addressed. Overall, the volume explores the controversial issues of autonomy and diversity in a way that attempts to engage with those who hold different views, rather than just talking about them. This makes the examination of the issue concrete and interesting, but also shows how open and unresolved it is.

I. Autonomy and the Common Good