

What is Diversity?

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Introduction

Diversity is “any dimension or state in which it is possible to differentiate groups and people from one another.” It is a concept strongly tied to the notion that organisms and ideas in this world, whether in the ecological, biological, or cultural realms, possess inherently different traits. Since the 20th century, people have only viewed “diversity” in an increasingly multilateral way, as it appears in a wide variety of subjects, such as biology, history, sociology, and even linguistics. It has emerged as a major cultural value of modernity. This essay will break down some defining facets of diversity, evaluate the justification for promoting diversity as a goal in all contexts, and argue for the importance of preserving diversity.

Diversity’s Quantitative and Qualitative Sides

The most common perception of “diversity” interprets the term from an almost purely quantitative perspective. “Diversity” is solely related to numbers: an ecosystem is diverse if there are many different inhabiting species, or a culture is diverse if it brings together the values of multiple foreign cultures. While this purely quantitative description of “diversity” is not necessarily wrong, it is slightly arbitrary.

There is a qualitative, normative side to “diversity.” This means that a subjective process is involved when people aim for diversity. For example, the term “biodiversity” usually is “taken to be all of natural variety at every level of taxonomic, structural, and functional biological organization.” However, this definition of biodiversity, although arguably accurate, cannot be implemented in practice, for the goal of conservation then would become all biological species and organisms. As a result, when governments and NGOs consider biodiversity, the constituents of it must undergo a procedure where they are subjectively selected - experts and scientists determine certain features of the biological realm that are worthy of protection. This decision to prioritize the protection of certain species over others often involves a cultural choice and the consideration of cultural norms. For instance, the panda receives a special level of protection in China because it is rare in numbers and possesses an irreplaceable cultural meaning; the bald eagle is protected by the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act in the United States, as it culturally represents that country. Hence, on many occasions, what deserves preservation is ultimately not entirely a scientific question, although scientific theories and values may play a role in that decision. The example of biodiversity illustrates that the idea of

“diversity” at large relies on human societal norms or choices. There is an inseparable qualitative aspect to the meaning of diversity.

Thus, the most appropriate definition of “diversity” must incorporate quantitative and qualitative facets. A simple definition that reads, “diversity is when an organization possesses these many elements” risks omitting its equally crucial subjective decision-making facet. Cultures and societies decide on the constituents of diversity. The term should not be thought of only as a number, a static criterion to surpass.

The Danger of Blindly Calling for Diversity

Today, with the rise of tension, many are calling for an emphasis on the importance of “diversity,” namely cultural multilateralism. Currently, protests are against attacks on state cultures, sexism, and racism. While it is wrong to argue that such calls are unimportant, the fact that people are increasingly fervently calling for “diversity” in general can reveal some potential dangers. There is a need for caution, especially when approaching cultural diversity. Does the promotion of cultural diversity include promoting different forms of slavery? Or protection of discrimination based on gender? Or nationalistic views? Even within a state or culture, does the inherent diversity of social structures and norms always deserve promotion and preservation? For a rather extreme example, the complicated caste system in India surely demonstrated some social diversity and different cultural aspects that are now legally eradicated by the Indian government. But is this diversity desirable? Illegal immigrants from the Mexican border to the U.S. add cultural and racial diversity to American society. But should the American government, without consideration, fully champion such a growth of diversity? The existence of traditional values allows a culture to possess more diverse stories. Yet is it so that people must defend every traditional value? Societies need a more detailed and methodical discussion than a simple, brutal, all-in endorsement of “diversity.”

People should attempt to erect appropriate measures and guardrails for cultural diversity. Especially on the internet, diversity can take on new dimensions as almost all barriers preventing communication are gone. The author believes that seeking unity on the macro perspective (on the level of government) may be beneficial to mitigate the unwanted effects of calling for unlimited cultural diversity. Cultural unity, on some levels in the future, might be a prerequisite for cultural diversity to blossom and be controlled.

The Importance of Maintaining Diversity

Diversity has various kinds; the author will focus on the importance of maintaining cultural diversity. First, maintaining cultural diversity keeps a variety of future paths open for humankind. When biodiversity is present, there are many ways for an ecosystem to exist and prosper. Similarly, when there is cultural diversity, the wisdom and experience of every culture can be

garnered. Each culture took a unique road of development and faced quite different challenges. As the future world becomes ever more unpredictable, having various sources to draw experience and ideas appears safer than relying solely on a single culture. A decrease in cultural diversity would decrease humankind's "adaptational strength" and make societies devoid of solutions when encountering cultural "blind spots."

Second, currently, preserving diversity is both urgent and imperative. People are gradually shutting their minds and asking, "What is the use of listening to you to talk about your culture?" This question entails extreme cultural pride. The dangers of having such mindsets are laid out. Refusing to be open-minded is a sign of an upcoming long-term cultural decline and even a fall to totalitarianism. During the Ming and Qing Dynasties, Chinese emperors possessed this exact mindset and pride, resulting in the eventual crumbling of their empire and ceaseless conflict during the "Century of Humiliation." As globalization accelerated in the 20th century, America and the Soviet Union refused to connect and, in effect, isolated their respective cultures. The ensuing Cold War that almost turned into a nuclear catastrophe was the ramification. Today, although history does not copy itself, cultural conflicts in the form of vehement attacks on cultural values are brewing at a worrying rate. If people choose to shut their minds at this moment, conflict shall be unpreventable.

Third, protecting diversity ensures the acknowledgment of human rights, one of the goals of human society. The protection of cultural diversity, in particular, is a consequence of this goal. In many areas of the world, local residents face deprivation of their cultural practices. In this case, shielding their cultural rights from attack is recognizing the sacred nature of the right to self-determination and liberty. A normative justification of diversity is "provided by the imperative to protect human rights."

Conclusion

Overall, the concept of "diversity" itself is not only strongly tied to quantitative abundance but also to qualitative decision-making. Additionally, there is no universal justification for a blind championing of diversity. Doing so, in fact, presents dangers to the stability and trend of development of the modern world. However, this is not to say that protecting diversity is wrong. Far from it. Protecting cultural diversity should top the agendas of current leaders as cultural conflict is an increasingly timely issue.

Diversity should eventually be tailored to the context of individual cultures and societies. The concept itself is highly flexible and ever-changing. Each nation should have the right to determine what it means to possess a diverse economy, social structure, and culture. Any attempt to generalize the discussion of diversity and any person who mandates that the world should follow a uniform requirement of diversity risks misinterpreting the term and spurring the birth of new conflicts.

