

Fostering differentness

A phenomenological approach to equality, difference, and inclusion
as hallmarks of *homo humanus*

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1. Introduction

This essay is a contribution to the reflection on difference, equality, and their mutual relation. Its core is an interpretation of a passage from one of Heidegger's lecture courses on Heraclitus (Heidegger 1987). We have chosen to devote much of the available space to a close reading of this passage in the context of Heidegger's thinking, and to forego its wider contextualization within the rich discussion of the aforesaid concepts in the phenomenological tradition and in the broader philosophical field. The reason for this choice is that, in our view, what Heidegger's approach can bring to the reflection on difference and equality — and thus on the issue of “humanism” — is in large part yet to be explored, and that its scope and implications in both theoretical and ethical terms have the potential for a much broader impact on contemporary debates.

The state of one of these debates is in fact part of the motivation for writing this essay, and at the same time a discourse against which to test the implications of our interpretation. We are referring to the debate on “the value of inclusion” (Felder 2018). This value appears to safeguard difference while granting equality, and to realize equality without curtailing difference. Our concern is not so much with the issue of whether this value should be adhered to or not, since its role, at least in global public discourse, is widely recognized. Rather, we are motivated by a dissatisfaction with the conceptual discordance concerning the notions of equality and difference which underlie, on the one hand, the declared *aspiration* of inclusion, and, on the other, its *implementation*. This discordance becomes particularly evident in the case of inclusive education, which will serve as a touchstone for our interpretive endeavor.

¹ The key text on this issue is still Heidegger (1981), to which we will refer at the end of this essay.

2. Equality, difference, and inclusion: the case of inclusive education

2.1 Equality, difference, and the humanity of the human being

The concept of human dignity refers to the dignity that resides in the humanity, or humanness, of the human being. Humanity is understood as a trait that does not allow for gradations: all human beings — including those whose actions are seen as inhuman² — are equally human, no one is more or less human than another. The full version of the principle which states that all humans are equal reads: all human beings are equal *insofar* as they are human beings; that is, based on the trait of humanity which they have “in common”. At the same time, human beings are seen as being essentially unique; that is, *ab ovo* different: no two human beings are alike — the only “thing” in which, by definition, they do not differ is the circumstance that they are human. However, since uniqueness and difference, or diversity, are themselves characters of the humanity of man, when we say that human beings are equal insofar as they are human beings, i.e., in their humanity, we are saying that they are equal in their difference, namely, in their different humanity; in short, the notion of human dignity implies that *all human beings are equally different*. This principle translates into the fundamental right to non-discrimination, which states that no one can be discriminated against — that is, treated unequally — based on their difference, i.e., on the different way in which they are humans.

2.2 The value of inclusion

Hardly any programmatic policy statement, today, comes without a reference to inclusion. The declared aim, at least, is that political systems, economic development models, and social structures be inclusive: namely, that they be open to participation for everyone, that they offer opportunities of success for everyone, that they provide recognition for everyone. It seems natural to assume that the demand for inclusiveness is a direct implication of the principle of non-discrimination: difference does not justify exclusion, i.e., unequal access to the space of political decision making, to the playing field of economic success, to the sphere of social recognition.

² The fact that we do not negate the humanity of those who act in a way that is inhuman (the fact that they are not unequal as far as their humanity is concerned) is at the basis of the idea of rehabilitation and the demand for humane conditions of detention under the rule of law.

After a closer look, we become aware that in each one of these contexts, inclusion is conceived as a value. We do not mean that it is intended generically as a “moral reference point”, which provides the kind of orientation on which decisions should be based. Rather, we understand “value” as a degree of empowerment, which does not have an accomplished form or “perfection” as its end, but marks a provisional level in a dynamic of empowerment which has the “drive to more” as its intrinsic, constitutive motive.³ This statement is not contradicted by the fact that different forms of perfection, or “ideals” (“the politically active citizen”, “the economically successful agent”, “the socially recognized person”), are declared as objectives of inclusive policies. For, in truth, — we maintain — the very spaces into which “the excluded” are meant to be let in, or actively introduced, are not constituted as spheres in which a certain degree of perfection, or a convergence with the “ideal”, can be attained; instead, they are “value spaces”; that is, spaces whose “points” have the form of ever-changing differential levels of power.⁴

If this diagnosis has some truth to it, the issue of inclusion presents itself as follows: a political, economic, or social system, constituted of different levels of power, has the dynamic of increase of power (i.e., the empowerment of a plus, or more, of power) as its driving force; what enables this dynamic, is seen as a “value”. As that which counts is differential power (*more* than the previous level of power, *more* than the power of others), the empowerment of power has an infinite horizon.⁵ A similar system has an intrinsic tendency to exclusiveness, in that, depending on the prevailing (“institutionalized”) setting of the conditions of empowerment, some — namely, those who are not capable of taking advantage of those conditions — will be systematically held at low levels of power: they will be rightless, poor, outcasts. In this kind of system, “exclusiveness” is the prevailing form of “difference”, while difference as a constitutive trait of the humanity of humans — in short, *human difference* or diversity — is ignored and dismissed. In a formula: *differential power excludes human difference*.

A system which, in its prevailing character, excludes human difference while at the same time excluding some human beings (or groups thereof) in terms of their access to differential power,

³ This understanding of value is largely indebted to Heidegger’s interpretation of Nietzsche’s metaphysics of the will to power, and the consequent diagnosis of the fundamental character of our epoch (cf. Heidegger 1961).

⁴ While power is intrinsically “on the rise”, i.e. driven to outgrow itself, in concrete interactions, one power overpowers the other, and grows, while the other is overpowered, and decreases.

⁵ In this context, political participation, economic advancement, and social recognition are in the first place constituted as values in the specified sense, that is, as conditions of the “empowerment of the more”. As such, they are characterized by a recursive insufficiency, which is most obvious in the case of economic advancement.

involves two distinct meanings of difference and equality: one pertaining to power, where equality is equal access to the enhancement of power; the other — which, though excluded, still somehow co-exists with it — pertaining to human dignity, where equality is equal recognition of different ways of being human. What is meant when, in a similar system, there is a call for inclusion?

What possibly leads to this call, and what seems to justify it in a fundamental sense, is the moral principle according to which all human beings are equal in their differences, and the consequent normative principle of non-discrimination: inclusion is meant to restore the equality of differences — which is perceived as being violated by factual exclusion — in response to a moral obligation. Hence, policies might be adopted in the name of “the value of inclusion”, which aim at correcting the situation of inequality and exclusion: more and more of the excluded are to be “made equal” through appropriate inclusive measures. How does this play out in a situation in which, according to the above interpretation, *human* difference is excluded? A successful policy of inclusion will help some to enter the domain of the pursuit of power differentials at conditions that, by convention, we define as equal. For them, a certain form of discrimination will have been removed. They will have been allowed, so to speak, to enter the race. However, does this by itself imply that human dignity — the condition in which “all differences are equal” — is restored? Does the system that excludes human difference in the first place, by the sole fact that a discrimination in terms of the conditions of value creation has been removed, become a system which admits difference or diversity? Are the newly included now equal *in terms of their human difference*? Or have they merely become part of a system that still neglects precisely that difference?⁶

The answers to these questions are not obvious. We must, however, admit that what is declared as an “inclusive policy”, designed and implemented in the name of “the value of inclusion”, does not necessarily envisage inclusion in the sense of a restoration of the equality of differences. Looking at the case of inclusive education will help us to further articulate this point.

⁶ Legislation on inclusion finds itself in a fundamental ambiguity: it might intend to restore human dignity in terms of a generic sense of the equality of differences; however, based on the notions of equality and difference that inform the context, all that it can demand is an equalization of the conditions of power.

2.3 Inclusive education

The *UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, in stating that “State Parties shall ensure an inclusive education system at all levels and lifelong learning” for people with disabilities, points out that an inclusive education system should be “directed to (a) The full development of human potential and sense of dignity and self-worth, and the strengthening of respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and human diversity; (b) The development by persons with disabilities of their personality, talents and creativity, as well as their mental and physical abilities, to their fullest potential; (c) Enabling persons with disabilities to participate effectively in a free society”.⁷

We can see how points (a) and (b) assume notions of difference and equality which, at least potentially, differ from those implied in point (c): the first two derive a right from the principle “all differences are equal”, while the third one demands a form of non-discrimination which, while *de facto* eliminating an unequal treatment which involves non-participation, is, so to speak, agnostic as far as the respect of human difference is concerned: the outcome of an inclusive policy will depend crucially on the underlying notion of education.

Let us see how this plays out in a reality informed by (the drive to) differential power.

In a reality thus informed, human beings are valued based on the abilities thanks to which they perform the enhancement of (differential) power. For each ability, a certain range of performative capacity (or performativity) is established as “normal” at a social level. Hence, the circumstance that one or more of these abilities are *unalterably* at a level which is below the range of normality, defines a condition of “disability”. The educational system (structures, methods, learning objectives, etc.) is geared toward the range of normal performativity and excludes the disabled, whom the criterion of performativity makes appear “less valuable”. On the other hand, the principle “all differences are equal” forbids us to think less of them in terms of their humanity, and demands that the equality of differences be restored through appropriate measures.

In what sense is this educational system “exclusive”? By defining normality, a social norm creates a “difference”, by which “the different” are excluded. However, in this manner, what is actually excluded, negated, is difference itself, namely, *human* difference. How so? In a sphere governed by

⁷ Cf. <https://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/convention/convoptprot-e.pdf> (art. 24).

differential power, even though it is known that there are factual limits to power enhancement, no such limits can be admitted, for any limit would negate the very driving force of differential power: to wit, the drive to more. In other words, with respect to this limitlessness, *no difference can be admitted*; only different *unimpaired* abilities for the enhancement of differential power are tolerable. Consequently, the difference of those who, on the other hand, exhibit an *insurmountable* limit in this respect, is stigmatized. The disabled confront those who are “normal” with actual (i.e., human) difference, namely, a way of being (as) human (as they are) which is not based on the *in principle limitless* enhancement of power. By creating a difference based on a social norm, and excluding those who, on that basis, are different, it follows that those who, by contrast, are “normal” secure their repulsion of human difference.

What happens, in terms of the objectives (a) and (b) above, and hence to the principle “all differences are equal” when, to fulfill objective (c), the disabled are factually included in a normal educational setting, such that, in this respect, “equality” is restored? While we cannot answer this question in general, it is at least conceivable that the formerly excluded now find themselves included in a sphere which — still — excludes human difference, causing their “underperforming”, and with it their stigma, to stand out even more.

The intricate conceptual constellation that emerges from the previous analysis reinforces the motivation for exploring a new understanding of equality and difference. The expectation is for an understanding of the “principle of the equality of differences” which is, as it were, immune to being conflated with a merely formal equality of the condition in which human difference (in the singular) is excluded. If the approach presented in the following paragraph meets that expectation, it should allow the issue of “inclusive education” to be entirely reframed. The conclusive paragraphs indicate the broad lines of such a reframing, and its relevance for the reflection on a humanism based on *homo humanus*.

3. A phenomenological notion of diversity: differentness

Diversity indicates a condition characterized by variety and difference. What is diverse is “not of the same kind; not alike in nature or qualities” (OED). An unlikeness in “nature” represents a deeper diversity than one in which things that share the same nature are dissimilar at the level of

(secondary) “qualities”.⁸ In the context of education and inclusion, it seems clear that this latter notion of diversity applies: everyone shares the same nature: to wit, that of being a — somehow “perfectible” — human being. This common nature establishes a fundamental equality, insofar as the condition of being human does not, as such, allow for gradation; differences emerge at the level of qualities, with their scope and implications depending on how their common nature is conceived in the first place. In this conceptual framework, equality (in nature) is the basis of diversity (in qualities).

The understanding of diversity which we propose in this essay (i.e., diversity as differentness) differs from the traditional one. It is mainly based on two related notions: 1. a phenomenological notion of difference (*Unterschied*) *qua* (primordial) inception, which can neither be captured as a “difference in nature” nor as a “difference in quality”; 2. a phenomenological notion of “the Same” (with a capital “S”; *das Selbe*) as another name of said difference, which neither is nor establishes a common “nature” or “essence” of humans, and which, moreover, is not a “principle of being” as can be found in the classical tradition of philosophy. These notions of “difference” and “Same” yield an understanding of human diversity which — unlike in the traditional framework — is, in a sense, the presupposition of an — itself otherwise understood — equality. Moreover, diversity *qua* differentness implies that, while the being of each human is strictly unique, it is precisely by owning this uniqueness that each one of us can grow into the togetherness with others to which, as humans, we originally belong.

To sum up: “the Same”, as we understand it, is itself *the* difference, and, as such, the origin of human diversity. Seeing that the latter is based on *the* difference, we indicate it with the word “differentness”. The differentness of humans marks them *ab origine* as equals, who grow into an original togetherness through their unique being. Hence, the equality of humans is not a matter of fact, i.e., a character which we can simply presuppose as a given; rather, it is a condition in which humans find themselves *depending* on the capacity to acknowledge and foster their differentness as results from the “non-essential” notion of the Same *qua* difference.

⁸ Classical ontology understands a secondary quality as one which is not constitutive of a thematic genus, so that a diversity concerning this quality does not affect the belongingness to the latter.

3.1 The Same, differentness, and equality

Our determination of a phenomenologically-informed notion of diversity will take the form of an interpretation of the following passage from Heidegger's lecture course in the summer semester of 1944:

[J]ede Gleichheit ... gründet in einer Verschiedenheit. Nur das Verschiedene kann gleich sein. Das Verschiedene ist gleich durch seinen je verschiedenen Bezug auf das Selbe. An diesem und seiner Selbigkeit hängt das Verschiedene in seiner Verschiedenheit und die Gleichheit des Gleichen. [...] Je ursprünglicher die Selbigkeit des Selben, um so wesentlicher ist in einer Gleichheit die Verschiedenheit, desto inniger ist Gleichheit des Gleichen. (Heidegger 1978, 250)

Every equality ... is based on a differentness. Only what is different can be equal. The different is equal by virtue of its each different relation to the Same. The different in its differentness and the equality of the equal depend on the Same and its selfsameness. [As a consequence, the following holds:] The more original the selfsameness of the Same, the more constitutive is the differentness in an equality, the more intimate is the equality of what is equal. (Translation ours.)

Commonly, “diversity” and “difference” are relative concepts: there is a difference when one differs relatively to the other in a certain respect. “Difference” is both the name of the relation between that which differs, and a quality that characterizes each of the differing elements with respect to the other(s). We call this qualitative-relative notion of difference “horizontal difference”. According to the above quotation, horizontal difference — i.e., differentness — consists in the circumstance that each of the elements involved are in a different relation to the Same; in other words, the “vertical” relation to the Same is constitutive of the “horizontal” differentness; hence, the latter indicates a quality of vertical relations, as well as the relation of these relations.

The different relation to the Same is further said to be the basis of, or the grounds for, an equality. Indeed, it is said that there is no (true) equality other than the one resulting from a different relation to the Same. Being each time unique, the relation to the Same implies a differentness. This vertically-constituted horizontal differentness, in turn, implies (an) equality: while being different by virtue of their differing relation to the Same, the differing elements are equal insofar as they are related to,

and thus gathered in, the Same itself. Hence, not only does differentness (based on the vertical relation to the Same) not imply a hierarchy, but it effectively excludes said hierarchy: the relation to the Same differentiates *into* an equality. By contrast, the “equality” of the undifferentiated is mere indifference; it is an equalization based on the annulment of differentness, which only allows for superficial diversities. Hence, whenever an equality is postulated, and, possibly, achieved, we must ask what this equality implies in terms of the differentness of what is held to be equal.

3.2 Difference (the schism) as the “phenomenon of phenomena”

To deformalize the indicated relations, we must provide a phenomenological characterization of the Same and what the text calls its *Selbigkeit*, or “selfsameness”⁹. While the context of the above quotation is the discussion of the notion of homology in Heraclitus, we can interpret the Same as another name for that which Heidegger, in his later thought, thematizes as *Seyn*, and thinks as *Ereignis* and *Unterschied*;¹⁰ the latter, which we render as difference, is to be distinguished from *Verschiedenheit*, i.e., differentness.¹¹ The words *Unterschied* and “difference” indicate the same phenomenon in different but convergent ways. *Unterschied* can be taken as “the in-between (*unter* = Latin *inter*, “between, among”) which gathers unto itself *while* sundering/scinding/schising (*-schied* from German *scheiden*, “to sunder, separate, divide”); on the other hand, “difference” indicates “the carrying-apart (Latin *dis-ferre*) which, as such, gathers unto the Same”.

It is critical to note that, in this understanding, *Unterschied*/difference is neither a “quality of something given” nor a “relation between something given”, but a self-standing phenomenon in its own right — indeed, the phenomenon *of* (namely, *before* and *for*) all phenomena. Other names of this primordial phenomenon in Heidegger are *Anfang* (inception, initiation) and *Ab-grund* (off-ground).¹² To establish his — neither qualitative nor relative — notion of difference, we refer to it as “the schism” (cf. Greek *schizō*, “to split, separate, divide”).¹³

⁹ Older English still has “self” in the meaning of “same”. *Die Selbigkeit des Selben* would then be “the self(ly)ness of the Self”. Here, we follow the present use and translate *das Selbe* with “the same”; however, in order to keep the reference to “self”, we speak of “the selfsameness [rather than just: the sameness] of the Same”.

¹⁰ For a theoretical justification of this claim see De Gennaro (2001).

¹¹ Thus we have *Unterschied* = difference and *Verschiedenheit* = differentness. On *Unterschied* cf. sections 57-61 of Heidegger (2005), 68 sqq.

¹² On *Anfang* cf. especially section 23 (“*Das anfängliche Denken. Warum das Denken aus dem Anfang?*“) in Heidegger (1989), 57 sqq., as well as Heidegger (2005); on *Ab-grund* cf., i.a., Heidegger (1989), 379 sqq.

¹³ On “schism” cf. De Gennaro (2013), 119.

The insight into the schism as a phenomenon in its own right, and the need to accept it as the initial concern and care — *the* contentious issue, or “sake” (*Sache*) — of thinking, is what sets apart Heidegger’s hermeneutic phenomenology from the tradition of metaphysics, spanning from Plato to our own time. To be mindful of the schism is to think “being itself” (i.e., *Sein qua* difference) “without beings” (namely, beings as such), thus taking heed of what remains unperceived, and hence unthought, within the scope (and indeed at the very heart) of metaphysical thinking. This scope is “the space of ‘beings’ in their ‘being’”, where “being” is conceived as “a highest being”, which, at once, is “the most being” of beings; by virtue of this qualitative difference in being (“highest”, “most being”), metaphysical thinking sees “being” (*Sein, esse*) as different from “beings” (*Seiendes, entia*). The space characterized by the qualitative-relative difference of being and beings can be called “ontological difference”.¹⁴

Ontological difference comprises being and beings as different from each other but does not exhibit the differentiating-gathering in-between of their twofoldness (*Zwiefalt*); in other words, it neglects to think (what hermeneutic phenomenology calls) “being itself” as the in-between, which, while withdrawing into itself, lets beings lie in their being, and, by thus unfolding the twofold, is itself the difference. Hence the thinking, whose scope is the ontological difference, overlooks and leaves unthought the difference itself. On the other hand, Heidegger’s *Denkweg* is the engagement of thinking in the primordial phenomenon of difference, which remains implicit in the thinking whose scope is the ontological difference: to wit, the tradition of metaphysics.

The next step we must take in the elucidation of the Same as *Unterschied*/difference/schism is the characterization of its “inner life”. While the Same is itself nothing human, it does however involve a constitutive relation to the human being. The “inner life” of the Same, in its reciprocal relation to the human being, is what Heidegger, from the early 1930s onward, ponders under the name *Ereignis*.¹⁵ For our purposes, the main trait to retain from the “inner life” of the Same is what was characterized above as its “withdrawing into itself”. The Same is itself “the schism”; however, the latter consists in a withdrawing, namely, in a “schisming into itself”, or, simply, a schisming. This schisming has nothing from which it schisms (i.e., it is not “a being” schisming from another being);

¹⁴ Cf. section 266 of Heidegger (1989) (“*Das Sein und die ‘ontologische Differenz’. Die ‘Unterscheidung’*”), 465 sqq., and the sections of Heidegger (2005) mentioned above in fn. 10.

¹⁵ The first of five major treatises that lay out *Ereignis* as the fundamental perspective of his thinking is Heidegger (1989).

conversely, pure (gathering-differentiating) schisming constitutes the phenomenon that we call “the schism” or “the Same”.

As we can see, the relevant notion of “schism” does not presuppose an entity that, from being given as one, schisms into two or more entities. The “schisming (into itself) of the schism”, in turn, is what the thematic quotation refers to as *die Selbigkeit des Selben*, which we translate as “the selfsameness of the Same”. The schisming — the “inner life” of the Same *qua* schism — can be thought of as a verticality in its own right: the Same is (i.e., consists in) an in-itself-descending (i.e., [schismatically] withdrawing) ascendancy. Pure, in-itself-descending ascendancy — this is the schismatic selfsameness of the Same, namely, the way in which the Same is “with itself the Same”, and, as such, is *Anfang* — the *one* initiation or inception.

3.3 There-being (*Da-sein*) and the human

The thus-characterized Same — the schism *qua* schisming — alerts to itself through its own clearance or openness. Heidegger’s name for this clearance or openness is *das Da*, “the there”. “The there” is the clearance of only, “nullibiquitous”¹⁶, gathering-differentiating Same. A fundamental trait of “the there” — the openness of the selfsame schism — is a need, or “carency”: “the there” is in need, or “carent”, of what it is initially without and thus calls for: to wit, (it is without) being sustained, upheld, borne as such (i.e., in its schisming). The bearing which “the there” is without, in turn, needs to be assumed, taken on, by an “attendant”, a “who”. The “who” that is called for, as an attendant, to take on the form of being which consists in bearing “the there”, is what we call “a human”. “A human” is a being whose being consists in having to take on the bearing of “the there” (the openness of the ineptual difference) in a form which the Same itself attunes and moulds for itself; as such, each human is an “attendant” of the Same in its selfsameness.

We can adopt a transitive notion of “being” to mean the same as “bearing”, and, instead of “to bear the there”, say “to be the there”. This expression elucidates the sense of Heidegger’s word *Da-sein*.¹⁷ *Da-sein* is “being the there”, or “there-being”, where “being” has the sense of bearing,

¹⁶ See Zaccaria (2021), 85 (fn. 122).

¹⁷ The word is introduced in §2 of *Being and Time* (Heidegger 1986, 7), whose scope (as the first part of an originally larger project) can be interpreted as a “hermeneutic phenomenology of *Dasein*”. On *Da-sein* in the later perspective of *Ereignis*, cf. i.a., part V. (“*Die Gründung*”) of Heidegger (1989), 293 sqq., in particular section 176 (“*Da-sein. Zur Erläuterung des Wortes*”), 300-301.

upholding. “To there-be”¹⁸ is the form of being which humans must take on so as to become the attendants of the Same as which they are originally claimed out of the Same itself. On the other hand, the common expression “to be there” indicates the mere subsistence in a location, which — no matter how “existentially charged” we make the ambient “there” — in the present context is an insufficient, if not misleading, notion, insofar as it neglects the inner differentness that, as we shall see, characterizes the very being of humans.

Humans are themselves insofar as they take on there-being as a task that constitutes the innermost trait of their being, and to which their being, as such, belongs.¹⁹ Thus, *Da-sein* is not merely another name for “the human being” or “the subject”: in fact, there-being and the human “who” are schismatically different, with the former remaining, as it were, on the side of the schism (the Same) itself. There-being is, within human beings, the constitutive trait of their being, and each human is within there-being as a “who” that is called to bear the openness of the schism, thus answering its expectation of attendance.²⁰ Just like the schism itself, there-being is nothing human; as such, it addresses those whose awakening to humanness has the form of a becoming-aware, namely of the need of acknowledgment and response that this address implies. In other words, the there-being, which is itself nothing human, contains a reference to each human as such, insofar as its trait of carency attunes and forms the being that is for those whom we call humans to take on. Through “the there”, the Same each time calls for the attendance of — and thus concerns and alerts — unique beings who “come to”, as such, in this call, and in their being “behave” in response to it. Thus, the schisming of the Same regards one being only, whose uniqueness consists in having to hold in regard the openness of what is itself uniquely unique.²¹

Human beings carry at the core of their being not only a trait that “differs from them”, but *the very differing, or schisming, of the difference*; to this trait, namely, to its need of being held in regard as such, their being, in turn, belongs. Insofar as their being consists — i.e., belongs to and is kept —

¹⁸ Or “to a-be”, as suggested by Zaccaria (2021), p. 24 sqq.

¹⁹ Hence, humans go back and forth between “there-being”/ “a-being” (*Da-sein*) and “off-being” (*Weg-sein*; cf. Heidegger 1989, 301-302).

²⁰ “The *human Da-sein* is *being-in-the-world*; human *Da*: the manner in which the human being, in her constitutive trait, is *in the Da-sein*. The human being in the *Dasein* — the *Dasein* in the human being.” (Heidegger 2011, 10).

²¹ This uniqueness does not concern the “species ‘man’”: it is not a “difference” that, for instance, distinguishes “rational animals” from “animals without rationality”. Rather, it is each time only as a unique *Da-sein*, to wit: a unique relation to the Unique itself, entrusted to a unique human being. A fuller characterization of this uniqueness — which requires an explicit thematization of the phenomenon of the world as *Geviert* (a notion elaborated by Heidegger in the late 1940s) — is beyond the scope of this essay.

in the differing of the difference, humans are each *in themselves* different, i.e., informed by an intrinsic (“vertical”) differentness; we can also say: they are each, in themselves, “another”. “To be another”, here, does not mean: to be someone else, namely, “a different person”; it means: to have, as the innermost trait of one’s being, the relation (i.e., the calling carency and the belongingness) to “the Other”, that is, to the difference itself *qua* schism, which keeps that being to itself, and avails itself of it, as a ground for its own openness. Thus, the being of each human, of each “I”, resides in the “Other” and its schismatic “otherness”; in this sense we can indeed affirm — with Rimbaud — that “I is another”.²²

Finally, the *Da-sein* that concerns each “who” as an inherently different “expected attendant” of the openness of the Same, is *ab origine* shared with others, who are also each in themselves “another”: *Da-sein* implies a constitutive “withness” — it is, in itself, a “with-being” (*Mitsein*). Why is that so? Couldn’t each one of us be “individually” in a relation to the Same, before eventually finding out that “others like us” also find themselves in the same “condition”? What can prove that there-being is constitutively a with-being? The phenomenological proof of this claim consists in the realization that the *Da* itself — the openness or clearing (*Lichtung*) for a world (which, in turn, is to be grasped as a with-world, *Mitwelt*) —, is originally assigned to the bearance of each human as (bodily) *heir* of, and *belonger* to, a variously articulated *kin*, within a *shared* provenance and destination. Hence, insofar as the *being* of humans consists in *Da-sein*, something like an “initially isolated human” is not conceivable. *Da-sein* is constitutively *Mitsein*, “with-being”, and the being of others consists in a with-there-being, *Mit-da-sein*.²³

As uniquely as the Same alerts and claims each “who” to bear its openness; as alone as we find ourselves in having to take on this bearance in the attempt to rise to our selfhood — this very uniqueness, and this very aloneness, have the form of an original withness, namely, the togetherness with others, whom the Same also each carries into their (vertical-horizontal) differentness: *insofar* as we each attain our own differentness (our “being another” by virtue of our constitutive relation to the Other *qua* difference), we acknowledge each other as equals in belonging *ab ovo* to *one*

²² “Je est un autre”. The phrase appears in Rimbaud’s letters to Georges Izambard (May 13, 1871) and Paul Demeny (May 15, 1871).

²³ There is no form of being — not even the most anchoretic, solitary or self-involved — that is not marked by the constitutive withness of *Dasein*, as a with-being with others, whose being, in turn, is a with-there-being. The with-structure of *Dasein* is explicated in §26 of *Being and Time* (cf. Heidegger 1986, esp. 118-121). A more extensive treatment of “being-with-one-another” — notably in its relation to the Same (*das Selbige*), to the verity of being, and to community (*Gemeinschaft*) — is in Heidegger (2001), §§12-20.

humanity. Only insofar as we take on the difference that concerns us, thus becoming our unique selves, and alone, are we capable of a true community with others; conversely, only insofar as an intimate sense of community fosters our *Da-sein*, are we each capable of attaining our selfhood in the full unfolding of its “otherness”.²⁴

3.4 Recapitulation, implications, and outlook

We can now return to the initial quotation from Heidegger’s lecture course and lay out its implications with regard to the differentness and equality of human beings.

1. “All equality ... is based on a differentness. Only what is different can be equal. The different is equal by virtue of its each different relation to the Same.” An equalness “decreed” on moral or legal grounds may have its own necessity; however, it is not sufficient for warranting a true equality. If what is declared to be equal is otherwise left in indifference (i.e., neglected with regard to its intrinsic differentness or otherness), the supposed equality is merely a formal equivalence, in which our humanity withers.²⁵

The equality of humans has its origin in the differentness that is constitutive of their humanity. Each human being is unique according to the forms, modes and tonalities in which he or she is called to take on the bearance of the openness of the difference (i.e., to uphold the clearance of the schismatic selfsameness of the Same); what provides this uniqueness, hence the diversity of humans, is one and the same schismatic trait, which, as it gathers all humans into *one* humanity, does not, in that respect, know degrees, or hierarchies, or ranks: *all forms of differentness are equal*, none is “more unique” than another. Where the differentness of humans — *qua* each in themselves different bearers of the openness of the difference — is clear and perceptible, *there* appears the original equality with others, hence the seed of a true community.

Equality is not based on a “general essence” that, within its scope, allows for different species or qualitative distinctions; if anything, the contrary applies: it is the original differentness that warrants the most intimate equality: namely, an equality out of the shared inner trait of difference. On the other hand, where the initiating difference is neglected, and the original differentness of humans

²⁴ Equality cannot be “made” or wantonly imposed; on the other hand, the alerting call into *Da-sein* instantly “equalizes in differentness”.

²⁵ In a regime of merely formal equivalence, some are likely to end up being “more equal than others” (cf. following note).

fades, giving way to a selfless indifference, surrogate forms of differentiation in terms of relative power prevail. In this case, power differentials establish a hierarchy of humanity, in which “more powerful” amounts to “more human”.²⁶

2. “The different in its differentness and the equality of what is equal depend on the Same and its selfsameness.” The first “and” in this sentence is to be read as: “and consequently”. The equally different belongingness of humans to the Same appears only to the extent to which they each are free to own their differentness. Indeed, human freedom is the spaciousness *for* the engagement in the (with-)bearing of the openness of the Same: to own one’s differentness is to *be* free. However, humans do not have this bearing, i.e., *Da-sein*, as their possession: the modes of their differentness and selfhood depend on the withdrawn “inner life” of the Same: to wit, on the manner in which the schisming, in which the Same consists, in the first place addresses and attunes each of them through its openness. That the innermost trait of their being consists in the “otherly” availability to the schismatic, gathering-differentiating Same; that their each being “ends” in the schism, constitutes their finiteness. Put differently, the said circumstance is constitutive of the uniquely human capacity for dying.²⁷

3. “[As a consequence, the following holds:] The more original the selfsameness of the Same, the more constitutive is the differentness within an equality, the more intimate is the equality of what is equal.” This proposition — which, according to Heidegger, belongs to “a rightly understood logic” (Heidegger 1987, 250) — follows from what precedes it. The Same, insofar as it is “carent” of the bearance of its openness, is itself the only origin and inception. The originality of the origin consists in the extent to which the selfsameness of the Same — its being with itself the Same *qua* schisming schism — perceivably holds sway, thus kindling and attuning the being of those who, “in intimate equality of differentness”, respond to its need of being borne as such. As the equally differing bearers find their differentness gaining in truthfulness (thanks to the growing firmness of the bearance of the Same), they see their equalness gaining in intimacy from the more profoundly shared — albeit for each other unknowable — belonging to its schismatic sway.

²⁶ The annihilation of differentness implies that the only relation to oneself and to others becomes a relation of power. However, power as such calls for overpowering; that is, for a differential (“a plus”) of power, relative to oneself and to others.

²⁷ Hence, the key proposition: “all forms of differentness are equal” can also be formulated thus: “all humans are equal *qua* mortals”. Does the exclusiveness of “normality” not exclude the “disabled”, and thus human difference, precisely because they are reminders of human finiteness viz. mortality? And does the same not hold with respect to haves and have-nots in terms of political rights, wealth and recognition?

We call “coalescence” (from Latin *cum-*, “together”, and *alescere*, “to grow”) the condition in which humans are gathered into an ever-more-intimately equal belongingness to the Same, by virtue of their ever-more-originally cleared differentness. “Coalescence” implies the most essential form of solidarity between humans — a solidarity based in the very “practice” of human existence, insofar as the latter is, as such, involved in the otherness of the schism, and thus “essentially” intertwined with others. The notion of coalescence plays an important role in our conclusive considerations concerning the domain of education; in fact, it provides a useful reference (a test, as it were) for judging the actual content, or “truth”, of what is pursued and attained in that domain — no matter on what moral or legal grounds — in terms of equality and inclusion.

4. Education and inclusion

What implications do the phenomenological notions of differentness and equality have for the understanding of education and inclusion? As the ordinary concepts of diversity and equalness become problematic, the same must be true for the way in which we conceive of (inclusive) education. Insight into the original differentness opens a perspective on an issue which, it seems, no philosophical reflection on education can forego, namely: *To what* are we supposed to educate? The question, here, has the same fundamental scope it had in ancient Greece. In Plato’s *Politeia* (Book VII, 514a1-2), the reason for the necessity of *paideia* is found in the very nature (*physis*) of human beings, *paideia* itself having the form of a transformative path *towards* the humanity of man, which unfolds as a changing relation to the “highest learnable thing” (Book VI, 504 d3-4), i.e., the good as the principle of being. In other words, for the Greeks (or, at least, for Plato), the sense of education consists in an initiation to the good, and this means: a path of learning directed towards an insight into the one “thing” by which — seeing that it is the ultimate reference of all sense — each human soul *as such* cannot not be concerned (cf. Book VI, 505 e1-2).

Independent of the social and political context (as well as of any inference concerning the “inclusiveness”) of ancient Greek education, the reference to *paideia* reminds us that the question: “To what should we educate?” has its first root in another, even more basic question, namely: “What is the human being?” For Plato, the matter is clear: 1. the humanity of the human being resides in the relation to the good, for which therefore each human strives “by nature”, but which is not at all

“natural” for him or her to recognize and assume explicitly; 2. since the original space in which the humanity of man unfolds is a coalescence — called *polis* — for, and at the same time based on, the good, the true benefit and usefulness of any action or circumstance in the private and public domain is strictly related to its accord with the good itself; hence, 3. at least those whom we expect to be the stewards of the *polis* (not as a factual regime, but as the said coalescence) should be educated to the habit of judging any matter in view of its relation to the good. Provided that this succinct characterization of Greek-Platonic “philosophy of education” is acceptable, it seems fair to expect that any contemporary educational stance should make itself transparent with regard to this same complex of issues. Conversely, the elaboration of a contemporary educational vision would have to be rooted in a diagnosis of the relation between the human being, coalescence, and a principle of truth in the context of today’s world.

Unsurprisingly, as soon as we even attempt such a diagnosis, we are confronted with seemingly unsurmountable difficulties. The first and most fundamental of these difficulties is that arguably we are (still) at a loss concerning the question: “What is the human being?” — and this despite the fact that in all domains of life, including the sphere of education, we constantly design, plan, implement, steer, monitor and evaluate all sorts of increasingly complex processes on the basis of some operatively convenient answer to that question.

Letting the being of humans consist in there-being as with-being, hence in a (vertical-horizontal) differentness, which as such implies equality, is not an answer to the above question: it is an attempt to *reopen it at its own rank*, namely as the question of the most fundamental and therefore vastest scope. Keeping in mind both the tentative character of this approach, we can outline some of the implications it has for our understanding of education and inclusion.

First, the phenomenology of *Da-sein* implies that education ought to be, at heart, an *education to differentness*. Having a sense of the circumstance that our being is generated into the availability for the sway of the schismatic difference, instills a rightful anticipation of the equality of humans, while at the same time setting the task for any educational path: that of favouring the discovery of, and growth into, the *unknown*, unique form of differentness that is for each human to learn to bear. Because this form is *ex ante* unknown, education at any level will consist in the first place in letting the educand feel confident in the reality of, and thus learn how to bear, that form of differentness (*qua* attendance to the Same) through whatever paths of knowledge *creation* the acceptance of the

unknowable Same itself demands. In fact, if knowing means preserving, in a notion, a unique instance of learning to bear the openness of the difference, any element of knowledge which emerges on such a path will be generated *as if for the first time* — and this for each educand and for each step on a path of learning.

The result of the free unfolding of such unique learning paths *qua* paths of knowledge creation will be that educands, while letting themselves be increasingly engaged in there-being, each grow into a unique being-in-the-world *qua* (unique) understanding of the with-world. Furthermore, by growing into being the “other” that is for them to be, thus learning to be themselves, they will each grow into different forms of “intertwinedness” with “others”, with whom they coalesce into an ever more intimate equality. “Successful” education will result in a coalescence of equally different attendants of the initial difference.

We now recognize that the described growth can be framed as a path of growing inclusion, namely, 1. a growing (vertical) inclusion into the relation of attendance to the needed bearance of the openness of the Same, *qua* 2. growing (horizontal) inclusion into worldly bonds in concrete forms of *being by* innerworldly things and *with-being with* other (coalescent) with-there-being. This implies that education *as such* can indeed be understood as a path of (vertical-horizontal) inclusion: the more inclusive our education, the more original our contribution to the creation of a with-world, the more conjoined in free solidarity the coalescence of equals who are called to attend to it as a shelter of the gathering-differentiating Same.

What, then, is an instance of “successful inclusion” — now in the common sense of a successful integration into the “regular” educational process of those who are excluded from it, say, due to some disability? Reports of “successful integration” suggest that the success each time shows in the unshackling of a hitherto latent, or repressed, differentness, which adds an original, unique perspective to the understanding of the world, thus regenerating the latter as a with-world. This results in the mutual encouragement to own one’s otherness, based on the experience that the more freely each differentness unfolds, the more evident grows its equality, until, in the resulting togetherness, the otherness of the Same becomes apparent as freedom. Last but not least, “successful inclusion” implies a fundamental reorientation of education itself — away from coercive, normalizing practices, and towards the fostering of the anticipated differentness of each.

The phenomenological notion of education *qua* inclusion provides us with a critical tool for the assessment of given educational realities: when such a reality (i.e., what happens in an individual class, in a school, in an educational system) presents itself as exclusive, in the sense that it *establishes* an exclusion and resists “successful inclusion”, this might bespeak that the reality is as such averse to differentness, and hence “uneducational”. In other words, the “exclusive includedness” of the non-disabled could imply a coercive repression of their differentness, hence a failure to provide the freedom and support that is needed for them to rise to a selfhood which enables them as free-coalescent indwellers of a world they are called to co-create and co-manage with others.

Based on this analysis, it is arguable if and to what extent a merely factual, formal inclusion is desirable. As long as inclusion is pursued out of an assumed moral and/or suffered legal obligation, without envisaging the inclusive character of education *qua* education to differentness, “success” might imply that formerly excluded educands obtain the “equal right” to an “education” which is unequal in a twofold sense, namely: 1. not capable of granting the original equality-in-differentness; and 2. itself generative of inequalities, given that performance differentials, based on normalized performance measures, are the residual objective of educational paths. In other words: what on its face counts as “successful inclusion” could well entail an exacerbation of the stigma of chronic underperformance that marks the “disabled” in the first place.

The globally dominant trend in education seems indeed to go towards exclusiveness: to wit, towards an education that, as such, excludes *all* educands from differentness, and therefore doubly excludes those who are seen as unable to effect performance within a predefined “normal” range of abilities. Educational systems are nowadays structured as cybernetic control circuits, in which “educational contents”, “educational goals”, etc., must have the shape of unequivocal information such as can be processed in cyclical phases of planning, implementation, feedback, control, and correction. Operative requirements, such as the drafting, choice and implementation of policies, require comparability of inputs and outcomes, hence the definition of objectively measurable standards. Any “learning objective” will need to be defined in terms of uniform parameters that allow for the design, execution and evaluation of processes guided by control data and benchmarks. Educational methods will be conceived in such a way as to cater to these data; that is, to produce outcomes that can be read and communicated within the relevant control circuit. Such outcomes will be captured in the form of rankings, ratings, time series, trend charts, and other tools designed

for signalling whether or not the implemented circuit is performing in the only recognized way: that of a differential plus of performance, which, if achieved, marks a “virtuous” improvement.

Inclusion itself will then be broken down, “itemized”, parameterized, and thus normalized into computable information, so that monitorable and evaluable processes aimed at set targets can be devised. The relative success of a strategy, or policy, of inclusion will be read off a set of indicators providing signals for corrective measures. In case of a contradiction or significant difformity between the judgement of an educator and the numeric response of an algorithmic evaluation, the latter will inevitably prevail since, unlike the “subjective” opinions of an individual, “objective” data provide a functional basis for controlled and accountable operations.

Finally, while “the system”, due to its unavoidable dependency on normalization, will produce echeloned and adjustable categories of “able” and “disabled” educands, it will not only remain blind to any form of diversity that resists reduction to an operable form; by its very functioning, it will hinder or suppress the looming of *any* differentness. In return, it will duly define measurable parameters of diversity, and formulate objectives and strategies of action, which suit its own functions by warranting a demonstrable assessment of “failure” or “success”.

5. Conclusion and outlook

The purpose of this essay was the provisional elaboration of a notion of difference and equality based on Heidegger’s hermeneutic phenomenology, epitomized in a passage from one of his lecture courses on Heraclitus. The (UN-)universal “value of inclusion”, and specifically the ambivalent notion of “inclusive education”, served both as a concrete motivation and as a touchstone for the results of this endeavor.

Our initial considerations highlighted a discrepancy between the notions of equality and difference implied, on the one hand, in the concept of human dignity and the moral obligation which flows from it; and, on the other hand, in the “value of inclusion” which, in our epoch informed by the empowerment of (differential) power, guides our policies. In light of this discrepancy, it seemed at least questionable whether the implementation of the “value of inclusion” can, as such, warrant a restoration of the “equality of differences”, and hence of human dignity.

The circumstance that, in present-day practice, the “dignity-based” notions tend, as it were, to be outplayed by those “power-based” ones, cannot be changed through a new conceptualization of these notions. There is, however, an important theoretical question that is not without bearing on the practical sphere: are we capable of conceiving the “space” in which the two kinds of notions constitute themselves in their mutual relation? As long as fail to do so, we may be able to *recognize* the somewhat illusive occurrences in which one of them is meant, while the other is implemented;²⁸ yet, we cannot *diagnose* them.

Our presumption is that this space is the ontological difference. Both the traditional notions of equality and difference, which are implied in the concept of human dignity as we know it, and the analogous notions based on value as a measure of power, are formed within the space of the ontological difference: that is, of what in this essay is called “the Same”. What occurs between them is an erosion of the — from the outset unthought — reference to the Same: if the rule of power (performance, effectiveness, etc.) is the consequence of that erosion, this would help us to understand why a traditional notion of human dignity is, today, hard to reaffirm.

Finally, it seems that “a rightly understood logic” is yet to be elaborated. Meanwhile, the notions of equality and difference which can be formulated according to this logic appear to show promise in the perspective of conceiving a renewed, dignified notion of the humanity of the human being. In *On Humanism*, speaking of the relation between his own thought and metaphysics, Heidegger writes the following:

Thinking does not overcome metaphysics by ascending even higher, thus surmounting it and thereby lifting it up to some place where it is at once abrogated and preserved; rather, it does so by redescending into the nearness of the nearest [...] The descent leads into the poverty of the ek-sistence of the *homo humanus*. (Heidegger 1981, 42; translation ours.)

²⁸ Cf. above, §2.3.

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