

opinions

Diversity not necessarily good

Recently, I've noticed a peculiar use of the word "diversity" in academia. I've heard such expressions as "I'm proud that my community is diverse" or more generally, "Diversity in a community is good." This is inappropriate.

Statements like the above can be interpreted in one of three ways: racial diversity is good; gender diversity is good; or ideational diversity is good. This might not be an exhaustive list of the possible meanings of the proposition "Diversity is good," but I think that any other interpretation will be subsumed under one of the three just given. I shall consider each in turn.

To say that it is good to have a mix of races in a community is a dangerous statement to make. In making this statement, we are saying that race is an attribute upon which it is appropriate to base a value judge-

ment. Thus, in saying that community X is good because it is diverse, we are making a claim comparable to that of saying that community Y is good because it is homogenous. To say that Y is good because it is comprised homogeneously of whites is to make a profound mistake. Perhaps Y is a good community, and perhaps it is not — to say that it is comprised only of whites is irrelevant here. It tells a fact that might be interesting — and we might wonder why it is that Y is exclusively white — but to say that it is good merely because it is exclusive is simply wrong. Similarly, to say that X is good merely because it is diverse is mistaken. Perhaps it is a good community, and perhaps it is not — to say that it is diverse is not relevant for making this distinction. In this case, to say that diversity is good is just to be prejudiced.

To say that a mix of genders is a

good thing to have in a community is a platitude. Who would contest this? However, perhaps what is meant is that it is good to have both genders in every community and in every situation — at work, at home, in the community at large, etc. If this is the claim, then the situations is some-

"...diversity is the result of something good..."

what different. We have been taught that men and women do not differ in any relevant attribute when it comes to such questions as who to hire in a given situation. One hires the person best suited to the job regardless of that individual's gender. Here again, gender is not an attribute that can sustain a value judgement. There-

fore, if we are to say that gender diversity in the workplace is a good thing, we must also propose that there exists some fundamental difference between men and women (and that both sexes — working together — yield the best result). To deny that also propose that men and women are fundamentally different.

Lastly, this claim could mean that it is good to have a diversity of ideas in a community. I happen to agree with this on at least one level. However, this is a most curious claim in that one cannot make it. To propose that ideational diversity is good is just to say that one thinks that it would be a good thing if everyone had his own opinion. However, in saying this, one says that one thinks that in at least one respect, every member of community should share the same opinion — namely that they should all believe that everyone

there is a relevant difference is to deny that it matters whether or not a working community is diverse or not (this is just to say that gender, like race, cannot sustain a value judgement). So, in this case, in order to say that diversity is good, we must should have disparate opinions. Thus, in this case, to say that diversity is good is to contradict one's self. This is to claim both that it is good for a community to hold diverse opinions and that it is good for them to be homogenous in their ideas (in at least one case). So, in this case, it seems that if we are to say that diversity is good we must go on to say that homogeneity is good as well, or we contradict ourselves.

To claim, "Diversity is good," does not turn out to be such a laudable thing to do. Clearly in most cases we would not wish to make this claim, and even in the one case where it is permissible, many would not wish to espouse its implications. Perhaps diversity is the result of something good, but this is an altogether different claim and to conflate the two is to tread upon dangerous ground.

Glenn Wylie

Debt-ridden Group of Seven

As the Russian Federation struggles to stabilize its chaotic economy following the collapse of the Soviet Union, President Boris Yeltsin is turning to the West for advice and support.

Unfortunately, the leading Western industrial nations which make up the Group of Seven (G-7) are not textbook examples of workable free-market economies. With the notable exception of Japan, the government leaders attending the summit will be presenting each other with balance sheets highlighted by monstrous national debts precariously balanced on a mere trickle of economic recovery.

With Yeltsin knocking on the door of the G-7, next summer's summit in Halifax represents a perfect opportunity for these nations to demonstrate to the newly democratized Russian Federation that western-style democracy is viable in Russia if care is taken to avoid complacency in the face of ballooning budget deficits. If he is to come away with confidence in his country's chosen path to democracy then it is essential that the leaders of the G-7 commit them-

selves to massive debt reduction. To do any less would be to discourage Russia from further loosening state control over their economy.

It will not be easy for most of them to commit themselves to the necessary austerity. French Prime Minister Édouard Balladur leads the government of the Fifth Republic which places much power in the hands of the president, the gravely ill François Mitterrand. And Balladur himself is leading a shaky coalition in the house of assembly.

Likewise for Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi. His demagoguery may not be enough to keep his fractured government in power in the face of waves of moral and financial scandal reminiscent of the Socialist regime of former Prime Minister Bettino Craxi. German Chancellor Helmut Kohl and his somewhat re-elected last month were re-elected last month with a tiny majority in the house, paling in comparison to their landslide victory the last time around.

The United Kingdom and Canada are on more solid ground in this regard, but neither of them are led by

governments elected with a mandate to eliminate (or even reduce) debt. Canadian prime minister and summit host Jean Chrétien's modest goal of merely reducing the budgetary deficit to three per cent of the Gross Domestic Product is ludicrous in its myopia. And massive cuts in government spending by British Prime Minister John Major's Tory government would certainly give much-desired exposure to the oppo-

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sition Labour Party, a party still struggling for new support following the death of their leader last year.

But it is absolutely essential that spending be cut and deficits eliminated. As public debt increases, governments' ability to shape the country and the economy diminishes. American President Bill Clinton would do well to heed the words of Thomas Jefferson, who illustrated

how it is incumbent upon each generation to pay its debt as it goes along. Certainly the signators to the Declaration of Independence would be shocked and dismayed to see their Union carrying a debt in the trillions of dollars. They never intended for governments to tie the hands of their successors in this way.

If these leaders are unable to commit themselves to massive austerity programs it will only serve to illustrate the ineptitude of these gatherings and the powerlessness of the leaders. Russia might as well send the heir to Czar Nicholas to talk shipbuilding with Prince Philip.

Perhaps that would be a better idea — send the nominal heads of state instead of the government leaders. Queen Elizabeth II could discuss family matters with the Emperor of Japan. Canadian Governor-General Ramon Hnatyshyn could test his bilinguism discussing the Normandy invasion with President Mitterrand. It would call for more pageantry and less substance, but let's face it — that's what these summits are all about anyway.

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