Transformative Dialogue

On Resolving Identity-related Moral Conflicts

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Summary

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Understanding intractable conflicts as identity-related moral conflicts

People come into conflict when the ability to achieve their goals is limited by other people, or when they think that this is the case. It is often possible to reach a solution through a clarification of facts, an exchange of arguments, an adjustment of mutual interpretations and/or a compromise. This is not possible in the case of 'intractable' conflicts, for example because the opposing parties have fundamental and conflicting convictions from which they cannot or do not want to deviate.

In today's world of digital communication, global trade, migration, emancipation and individual development, confrontation with people of different cultural, ideological, philosophical or political convictions is unavoidable. Such confrontations lead to (fierce) discussions about substantive subjects, such as 'Zwarte Piet', medical-ethical discussions about abortion, euthanasia or 'completed life', stem cell research, the (limits of) freedom of expression, different interpretations of human rights, renunciation of a lifestyle because of environmental effects ('you are no longer allowed to fly'), animal rights, factory farming, hunting, the refusal to pay taxes that contribute to arms purchases or subsidies for polluting activities, et cetera. Sometimes confrontations lead to protracted armed conflicts, such as between Israel and Palestine, in Kashmir, the civil wars in former Yugoslavia and Rwanda, apartheid in South Africa or fundamentalist terrorist attacks.

Resolving such conflicts is urgent because it often involves issues that are important, or even essential, to people. In other words, the ability to fully and freely be who they (believe) to be depends on the successful resolution of the conflict. In addition, some conflicts are accompanied by violence and even relatively peaceful conflicts can escalate. Resolving intractable conflicts may be urgent, it is rarely realized. These conflicts are, after all, 'intractable'.

The persistence of this kind of conflict can be understood in terms of unmet fundamental needs. An intractable conflict arises when fundamental needs, such as nutrition, safety, shelter, identity, recognition and participation are not met. Because people cannot relinquish these kinds of needs, they are 'non-negotiable'. Conflicts about such needs are therefore persistent and 'solutions' that do not guarantee the fulfillment of these needs do not last.

Fundamental needs are related to the concept of identity on two levels. On the one hand, having a (positive) identity is itself seen as a fundamental need, on the other hand, conflicts about fundamental needs are always expressed through identity groups. For example, under the Apartheid regime in South Africa, not fulfilling the basic needs of a specific group was institutionalized based on a specific characteristic, skin colour. Such a collective frustration of basic needs reinforces the experience of this group identity and makes the conflict express

itself through a conflict of identity groups, in this case based on skin color. In the absence of an observable identifying feature, the failure to fulfill basic needs triggers the formation of identity groups. For example, people may object to abortion for various reasons, but they automatically fall into the 'pro-life' group. Being 'pro-life' then becomes part of their identity. The same goes for 'pro-choice'.

An intractable conflict is identity-related if it is not possible for two (or more) parties to simultaneously express their identities, in other words realize their fundamental values or idea of the good life. There are intractable conflicts that can only be properly understood as 'identity-related', meaning that what is at stake touches directly on what people consider essential to who they are. In other words, the subject of conflict is related to the identity of the parties to the conflict.

Because an identity-related conflict concerns how parties should behave in relation to each other with regard to fundamental values or needs, such a conflict is also always a moral conflict. How exactly the 'moral' can be defined differs per theory. Issues about what social norms should apply to the implementation of fundamental values or the fulfillment of fundamental needs are generally regarded as moral.

Although an identity-related conflict is also always a moral conflict, throughout the thesis the formulation 'identity-related moral conflicts' is maintained. Although this is redundant in the context of this thesis, the intention is to keep in mind what kind of conflicts are concerned. It is not about factual differences of opinion about what someone is like, it is about normative differences of opinion about how people should treat each other with regard to fundamental values and needs.

In Identity-Related Moral Conflicts (IRMCs), parties want to express their identity and they claim that the other should not hinder them in doing so, or should actively participate in it. What is claimed back and forth does not need to relate directly to the identity of the other; social norms focus on behavior, not directly on having a particular identity, but a conflict over social norms can imply a conflict over identity. If certain behavior for party A is an expression of its identity, then party B's claim that this behavior should change implies that party A should change its identity. The attachment to the behavior is there because it is the way of expressing one's own identity. 'Being' implies for A 'doing'. So, if celebrating 'Sinterklaas' with the inclusion of its controversial tradition of 'Zwarte Piet' is, according to A, an expression of a certain identity, then the claim that 'Zwarte Piet' should be abolished is in fact a claim that A *should understand himself differently*.

Alternative conflict resolution of intractable conflicts through 'transformation'

In recent decades, many initiatives have been taken to solve identity-related moral conflicts in an 'alternative' way by paying attention to fundamental needs and the identity of groups. Various practical theories have been formulated and various methods such as workshops, dialogues, conferences, etc. have been tried out (see section 7.1.2 for the elaboration of some examples). This alternative conflict resolution is aimed at a 'transformation' of how those involved see themselves, each other and their relationship. Transformation can be understood as a process in which parties become aware of their presuppositions, for example about what

is essential to them, and how these presuppositions limit how they perceive, understand and experience the world. Transformation takes place when these presuppositions are adjusted in such a way that a new, more integral and inclusive perspective becomes possible and the parties in question act on that new insight.

Such alternative conflict resolution initiatives are often incidental actions in the context of large-scale, violent conflicts, but there are also initiatives that relate to more practical, everyday conflicts, for example in mediation. Despite inspiring and promising results, empirical research into the effectiveness of this approach to conflict cannot be convincingly conducted. What is missing is a substantiation of when there is success and what the intervention is based on. Due to the lack of both a solid foundation and empirically proven effectiveness of 'alternative' conflict resolution methods, in many conflict situations negotiation-based resolution strategies are retained (which, ironically, could be said to be proven ineffective). Or the parties choose warfare.

The aim of this thesis is to find or develop a theory that provides a normative underpinning of what constitutes a stable and just solution of identity-related moral conflicts. Such a theory offers new possibilities for empirical research into the effectiveness of specific interventions, and indications for the development of institutions with which conflicts can be resolved at an early stage, or even prevented. Then, it is not only about resolving conflicts, but also about ensuring constructive cooperation between people with different fundamental values and beliefs.

Understanding identity as a network of commitments

One can find libraries filled with philosophical works about 'identity'. In intractable conflicts, it is mainly about biographical identity, or in other words: how does someone understand and define himself. Objective and social characteristics can influence what one considers essential to who he or she is, but these characteristics are not constitutive of self-understanding in a subjective sense. A person can understand himself in a way that deviates from objective or social characteristics.

The distinction between objective, social and subjective claims is important to properly understand identity-related moral conflicts. Conflicts can be distinguished into three layers:

- Objective: a difference of opinion about factual circumstances, for example to what extent animals have feelings or consciousness (on the basis of which hunting or livestock farming should or should not be allowed);

- Social: a conflict of interest over scarce resources, for example nature lovers want to preserve a biodiverse woodland while project developers want to build houses;

- Subjective: a frustration in being able to express one's own identity, for example an orthodox believer who does not want to be publicly mocked for what is sacred to him or her.

For objective claims, 'truth' is the criterion to judge the validity of claims. For social claims, that is 'justice'. That identity is subjectively understood as someone's self-understanding does not mean that the subjective claims associated with that self-understanding are also automatically valid. One could be mistaken in his or her self-understanding, or at least develop a more refined self-understanding. I refer to the criterion for the validity of subjective claims as 'authenticity'.

The formulation 'what someone experiences as essential to who he or she is' is perhaps the most general interpretation I use for someone's 'identity'. It's a mouthful, so sometimes I'll stick to 'what's essential to someone', or simply 'who they are'. 'Self-understanding' can be considered as a synonym of 'identity' in this thesis.

What someone experiences as essential to him or her has practical meaning: he or she wants to express and realize what is essential to him or her. In other words, one's self-understanding consists of commitments. If someone has a commitment, it means that someone has the will to fulfill the intention expressed in the commitment, in other words to generate the necessary actions and avoid tempting oneself not to fulfill the commitment. When someone tries to realize his or her commitments, there is 'self-expression'. This also means that a change in commitments constitutes a change of identity, and therefore of self-understanding.

People have multiple commitments. Some are relatively unrelated (such as a commitment to family well-being and a commitment to meeting work obligations), others are strongly interrelated (such as a commitment to meeting appointments and a commitment to achieving certain results). Commitments are directly or indirectly linked. One's identity can therefore be understood as a network of (essential) commitments. When someone is aware of some commitments, he or she then has an articulated understanding of these commitments. Often a refined, more precise articulation is possible and some commitments that are present are still completely unarticulated.

Question for the thesis: stable and just solutions

An identity-related moral conflict (IRMC) is resolved when the parties to the conflict no longer hinder each other's self-expression. This means that parties can freely try to realize their (essential) commitments. This means that although new conflicts may arise over time, the same conflict will not flare up again. If this is fulfilled, then there is a 'stable' solution.

A theory that distinguishes a stable solution does not do so in retrospect, but looking forward. A solution is stable if, viewed from the perspective of a person's own goals, it is rational to act in accordance with the relevant solution proposal, in all conceivable circumstances. In an IRMC, it is not just interests that can be maximized that are at stake, but commitments that are essential for both parties. If that would be possible only in specific circumstances, the solution would not be stable. As soon as circumstances change, it could be rational to deviate from that solution proposal. The conflict could flare up again. When testing the solution proposals of various theories, I will therefore analyze whether there are foreseeable circumstances in which it is rational for the parties to opt for an action option other than that of the solution proposal.

A stable solution does not always have to be fair. A situation in which a dominant party to the conflict achieves a stable situation by the 're-education' of a minority, I do not see as a 'solution' but as an effective 'oppression' or 'brainwashing'. The distinction between solution and oppression is a question of justice, in other words does every party or every person get what is due to him or her?

Different normative theories conceptualize "justice" in different ways. According to a 'Might makes Right'-theory, for example, the scenario just outlined could be considered a stable and just solution. To rule out such theories, I provide a general framework for what a 'just' solution must meet. Oppression occurs when people cannot determine who they are by themselves but are forced to a certain self-understanding. Someone is autonomous if he or she lives and acts in accordance with his or her own values, beliefs, reasons and commitments. A solution is therefore just if the 'autonomy' of the parties involved is guaranteed. In other words, 'justice' at least means that every human being should in principle be able to be who he or she is, and must also be able to express what is essential to him or her. Because of this *desideratum*, I examine theories and authors that also aspire to fulfill this.

The addition 'in principle' refers to the possibility that a theory excludes certain identities on justifiable grounds. This means that a theory from the perspective of an identity itself substantiates that expressing that identity is not rational. In other words, the solution that is proposed by a theory is just if and only if that solution can be justified from the perspective of any rational identity.

This dissertation stems from the practical urgency to resolve persistent and potentially violent conflicts. Since this is a philosophical study, and not a practical sociological study, the approach is theoretical and conceptual. The research question is therefore not how to solve IRMCs in practice, but how a just and stable solution can be understood conceptually. The research questions are therefore:

1. Is it possible to discern a stable and just solution for IRMCs using existing theories?
2. If (1) fails: is it possible to formulate a theory that can distinguish stable and just solutions, and what does this mean for the concept of 'justice'?
3. If (2) succeeds: how can this theory be practically applied and/or institutionalized in such a way that IRMCs can be solved effectively?

Philosophical theories of social conflict resolution

Many philosophers have proposed how stable and just solutions to social conflicts in general can be achieved. A classic approach is to view social conflicts as conflicts of interest over scarce resources. According to Thomas Hobbes (1588 - 1679), people prevent a self-destructive war of all against all by voluntarily submitting to a restrictive authority. This 'contractual' idea is a common thread in modern political and social philosophy, where the emphasis was initially on legitimizing existing authority, but has increasingly shifted to the freedom of the individual. The question then is how a 'social contract' can be justified for everyone.

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) made an influential proposal to base this justification on 'reason' (understood as the human, rational mind). In Kant's thinking, moral precepts are reasoned from each individual's application of universal rational reasoning. In contrast, Hegel (1770-1831) argued that people are part of a community that determines people's fundamental values and norms, and that this community constitutes how people understand themselves. In Hegel's view, Kant's individual, rational approach does insufficient justice to this social dimension of people's self-understanding. Identity-related moral conflicts are so intractable because particular, fundamental values associated with membership in a specific community clash. Kant's universal precepts may conflict with these fundamental values, while - according to Hegel - from the perspective of such an identity, Kant's universalism is unjustified.

So, on the one hand there is the idea that it is possible to justify universal solutions, on the other hand that people are inevitably part of a community with specific (particular) fundamental values. The tension between these basic ideas is an important theme in philosophy since Kant and Hegel and is the underlying philosophical issue in discerning solutions to identity-related moral conflicts. After all, such conflicts involve non-negotiable, particular and fundamental values of different parties that cannot be expressed and realized at the same time. How, then, can a stable solution ever be discerned that is justified from the perspective of each identity, in other words universally just?

Since Kant and Hegel, various theories have been developed that try to resolve the tension between the universal and the particular. I investigate whether three influential theoretical lines of thought can distinguish a stable and just solution for IRMCs. These lines of thought have in common that justice is defined in one way or another in a form of coordination or deliberation between conflicting parties. All three can therefore be regarded as part of a 'deliberative tradition'. The lines of thought differ in terms of strategy on how to deal with identity differences. I distinguish the following strategies:

- *Strategy 1: privatizing identity differences*: in this strategy a distinction is made between a public and private sphere. In the private sphere everyone is free to live according to their own particular values, but the public sphere is organized according to universally justified norms. An influential elaboration of this idea can be found in John Rawls's Political Liberalism. In distinguishing solutions from IRMCs, the challenge here seems to be how to bring and keep the clashing identities in the private sphere. After all, an IRMC is already a public conflict.

- *Strategy 2: arguing from identity differences*: in this strategy, identity differences are not relegated to the private sphere, but are fully admitted in the public debate about just norms. The idea is that any conceivable norm or value may be presented in a dialogue in which agreement is reached on the basis of rational arguments (and not, for example, through the exercise of power). Jürgen Habermas' Discourse Ethics is an influential elaboration of this strategy. In advance, the challenge of this line of thought seems to be to show how rational argumentation is possible about fundamental values.

A rational dialogue can well lead to new insights about fundamental values, but rational arguments do not seem to be decisive for someone's identity.

- *Strategy 3: empathizing with identity differences*: this strategy is aimed at an inner change of the fundamental values of the parties to the conflict. The idea is that by getting to know each other's perspective, parties can refine their own self-understanding. Based on the thinking of Charles Taylor, this idea can be elaborated in what I call an 'Articulation Ethic'. When moral conflicts are approached as an opportunity to refine one's self-understanding, stable and just solutions can indeed be achieved. The challenge is to substantiate that a new self-understanding is more refined, in the sense of being authentic, than the original self-understanding. If no criterion is available for this, then any transformation is justified at any given time, making solutions unstable.

Challenges to existing theoretical lines of thought

From the analysis of Political Liberalism, I conclude in chapter 2 that the strategy of privatizing identity differences is unjustified for identities in which public expression of fundamental values is essential. IRMCs exist precisely because identities conflict in the public sense. Distinguishing a solution from IRMCs requires a theory in which the whole identity is involved in a public sense.

Discourse Ethics is a theory in which every aspect of one's identity can be involved in conflict resolution, but it can only discern stable and just solutions if what I call a 'modern ethical assumption' is met. This assumption implies that conflicting parties have an identity in which universal moral norms always take precedence over particular fundamental values. In chapter 3 I show that this cannot be assumed in IRMCs. A change in the self-understanding of parties in an IRMC towards this modern ethical assumption would be necessary. Seyla Benhabib calls a discourse in which a change of self-understanding is central a 'moral-transformative experience'. However, such a morally transformative experience is not conceptualized within Discourse Ethics.

The Articulation Ethic offers a theory with which a discourse can be conceptualized as a morally transformative experience. In this way, a stable and just solution can be distinguished for IRMCs. In such a process, the parties come to a more refined self-understanding by empathizing with each other's identity. However, from the perspective of any identity, a criterion for 'more refined' must be justified. Without such a criterion, the parties can empathize with each other and understand each other in depth, but still hold on to their own identity, which in fact deepens the conflict. Or, if parties do conclude to a different self-understanding without a criterion, then the arbitrariness of this means that parties cannot be assured that a solution is stable. In chapter 4 I show that Articulation Ethic lacks such a criterion.

In short, for any of the theoretical lines of thought, the challenges are too great to distinguish a stable and just solution for IRMCs. This seems to imply support for philosophers who argue that conflicts over fundamental values cannot be resolved. According to these 'agonistic' thinkers, justice is not served by naively hoping that a universal consensus can be achieved. That attitude could legitimize the exercise of power by dominant parties. According

to the agonistic line of thought, justice benefits from accepting the existence of such conflicts and continuing to conduct a dialogue that is not aimed at rational consensus, but at improving mutual relations despite fundamental differences.

I share with this agonistic critique that it is important to recognize identity-related moral conflicts as such and that a dialogue based on rational argumentation alone does not offer a solution. However, based on the analysis of the three theoretical lines of thought, I see reason to look further into whether a stable and just solution of IRMCs can be distinguished.

The Transformative Dialogue

I have indicated above that the Articulation Ethic lacks a justified criterion for distinguishing one self-concept as 'more refined' - in the sense of authenticity - than another. The idea is to base this criterion - inspired by Discourse Ethics - on some form of agreement about the authenticity of everyone's self-understanding. Important questions with regard to this idea are: "How will this be possible?" and "How does this relate to the desideratum of autonomy, in other words that everyone should in principle be able to be who he or she thinks he or she is?"

I call the interaction in which parties agree on authenticity a 'Transformative Dialogue'. This is a dialogue in which parties become aware of their presuppositions, for example about their identity, and of how these presuppositions limit how they perceive, understand and experience the world and others. Based on this insight, parties can opt for new presuppositions about their identity, enabling a new, more integral and inclusive perspective.

A Transformative Dialogue contains a number of necessary steps to arrive at a stable and just solution to intractable, identity-related conflicts or challenges. When going through these steps, it is good to realize that they are conceptual steps. The steps are conceptually sequential in the sense that a subsequent step uses what was conceptually enabled in previous steps. In different situations, these conceptual steps can be interpreted differently in a practical sense. In some dialogues these steps are followed in a self-evident manner, in other situations a method that explicitly marks successive steps can be helpful.

The steps of a Transformative Dialogue are:

- *Step 1: Commitment to conflict resolution*: A Transformative Dialogue requires commitment from the parties involved to resolve the conflict.

- *Step 2: Fusion of horizons*: the next step is for parties to understand and fathom each other's perspective. They put themselves in the other person's perspective in such a way that they realize that that perspective could also have been theirs. The moment they experience that both perspectives are alternatives for the same characteristic in people's lives (a so-called 'human constant'), a fusion of horizons takes place. For example, meat eaters and vegetarians both try to get their food in a sustainable way. Putting yourself in the perspective of the other person can already lead to a transformation, for example if a carnivore simply did not know what the environmental effects of eating meat are.

- *Step 3: Distinguish alternatives of oneself*: in a fusion of horizons, parties can distinguish at least two alternatives of oneself. The alternatives of oneself differ in some part of the network of commitments related to the conflict topic. Note that it concerns alternatives *of* oneself and not *for* oneself, because it concerns (part of) someone's identity, or self-understanding. Several alternatives are conceivable for the part of the network of commitments that is associated with the conflict topic.

- *Step 4: Internal and external consistency in networks of commitments*: based on the commitment to resolving the conflict, both parties investigate which alternatives of oneself are consistent with their own entire network of commitments (internal consistency) and which are also mutually consistent (external consistency). Consistency means that there are no conflicting commitments. To achieve consistency, the scope of the conflict can be increased, or alternatives of oneself are considered that relate to a larger part of one's network of commitments. As a larger portion of one's network of commitments becomes involved, the transformation becomes 'deeper'.

- *Step 5: Transformation: identification as a new alternative of oneself*: when parties consider a new set of commitments as part of their network of commitments instead of the original ones, transformation takes place. Because the network of commitments constitutes the individual's self-understanding, or identity, that identity transforms as original commitments are replaced by new ones.

If the new networks of commitments from both parties are consistent internally and externally, a transformation has taken place that has stably resolved the original conflict. The solution is stable, because the identities of both parties are transformed. They have no rational reason for other choices of action. In all steps of the Transformative Dialogue, the autonomy of those involved is guaranteed. However, an urgent question still is: "How does this form of agreement about everyone's identity relate to the idea that someone is autonomous if he or she lives and acts in accordance with his or her own values, beliefs, reasons and commitments?"

Intersubjective authenticity vs. a fixed identity

The Transformative Dialogue assumes that people can think of several alternative versions of themselves. If one or more persons regard their own identity as fixed, then there is no possibility to distinguish such alternatives of oneself. In view of the intractability, this seems to be exactly the case in IRMCs: parties regard their identity as fixed and defend it fiercely. It might still be possible to understand another in a fusion of horizons, but not to distinguish alternatives of oneself. The insight can then be, for example: "if I had been born in your context, I would have been like you, but now I have become who I am, and that is unchangeable".

Based on insights from developmental psychology, I show in section 5.2 that the idea of a fixed identity can be exposed as a misunderstanding. Moreover, autonomy and authenticity should not be understood individually, but intersubjectively. People grow up within a community that shares beliefs, norms and values, or in other words within a 'horizon of meaning'. Step

by step, people acquire this horizon of meaning in a process of socialization and thus develop their identity. Their mind is literally (partly) formed by that horizon of meaning (I call this 'mindshaping'). And since a horizon of meaning is dynamic, so is identity.

In this socialization process, there are times when the self-understanding developed by children collides with the normative expectations of the community. Such identity-related coordination problems are solved by children transforming their beliefs, norms and values, in other words their identity (and the coordination problems therefore do not develop into intractable conflicts). It is also possible that the horizon of meaning of the community evolves under the influence of such clashes with new generations. What is authentic for people is therefore partly determined by the common horizon of meaning and partly by individual interpretations insofar as the horizon of meaning leaves room for this (or is adapted to it).

What is authentic is therefore intersubjectively determined. This means that the 'own' values, beliefs, reasons and commitments that an autonomous or authentic person lives by are not found exclusively in an individual, nor in a social group, but intersubjectively, in other words 'in the relationship between individual and others'. Authenticity is not the revelation of a true identity that every human being possesses deep down. Nor is authenticity a conformity to the prevailing values and norms in a community. Authenticity is present when there is mutual agreement about everyone's self-understanding. The Transformative Dialogue enables parties to reach this agreement autonomously.

When a child has been socialized successfully, it has appropriated the community's horizon of meaning. His or her self-understanding is then repeatedly confirmed by the environment and it stabilizes. If the self-understanding then becomes stabilized, the misunderstanding of a fixed identity which could be discovered by an individual by consulting his own feelings and experiences may arise. Identity fixation has efficiency benefits for group collaboration. It makes the division of roles and tasks easy. This does not cause any problems in communities with a more or less stable horizon of meaning.

However, in today's globalized society, identity-related coordination problems are not limited to the socialization process of children, but adults are also regularly confronted with major differences in fundamental values. Everyone's horizon of meaning is repeatedly questioned. If such an identity-related coordination problem concerns an aspect of one's self-understanding that has become fixed, then an intractable IRMC arises.

Letting go of the idea of a fixed identity makes it possible to treat intractable and seemingly unsolvable IRMCs as identity-related coordination problems that can be resolved through mutual mindshaping. This means that in a Transformative Dialogue people understand each other more deeply and form each other's identities. The identity and mutual relationship of those involved can then become more authentic. In the literature on alternative conflict resolution, conflict is therefore not seen primarily as a problem, but as an opportunity with creative potential.

The Transformative Dialogue is a form of mindshaping in which the autonomy of those involved is guaranteed, so that the resulting solution is not only stable, but also just. This does not mean that all people need to have exactly the same fundamental values, but that they have mutually compatible fundamental values, and can also work together to realize shared

commitments. Just as truth is the concept that marks agreement on objective claims, and justice is the concept that marks agreement on social claims, so authenticity marks agreement on subjective claims.

In other words, it is authentic to be committed that (all) others can realize their fundamental values. The theory of the Transformative Dialogue links each person's own particular self-expression to the universal commitment to the expression of everyone else's particular identity.

Justification of the commitment to the Transformative Dialogue

Until now it has been assumed that the parties are committed to a stable and just solution to the conflict, and - since the Transformative Dialogue makes this possible - therefore to the Transformative Dialogue itself. I will argue that this commitment is inevitable.

In the first place, the commitment to resolving an IRMC is necessary because the continuation of the conflict hinders parties in their self-expression. In short, it is prudential to want to resolve the conflict. If oppressive resolution strategies are rejected for ethical, moral and/or prudential reasons, the Transformative Dialogue remains.

Second, the commitment to resolving an IRMC is morally obligatory. After all, in an IRMC the parties do not mutually recognize the value of each other's identity. An IRMC implies the absence of recognition. The absence of recognition is unjust, because it is only possible to express one's own identity fully in a situation of recognition. And that everyone can in principle express his or her own identity is the desideratum of this thesis. In short, the commitment to resolving an IRMC through a Transformative Dialogue is morally justified, because that dialogue discerns a stable and just solution that constitutes mutual recognition.

However, both the prudential and moral arguments for commitment to the Transformative Dialogue are not justified from the perspective of parties in an IRMC. The parties in an IRMC have a fixed self-understanding in relation to the subject of conflict. That is why the conflict is so intractable. Although this belief rests on a misunderstanding, it cannot be understood as a misunderstanding within the horizon of meaning of parties with a fixed self-understanding. After all, in order to understand it as a misunderstanding, this party would have to have already abandoned the conviction of a fixed self-understanding. And that is precisely not the case in an IRMC.

Therefore, I give an additional argument in which I show that it is self-defeating for a party with the conviction of a fixed self-understanding not to be committed to the Transformative dialogue. This argument for the inevitability of the commitment to resolving an IRMC through the Transformative Dialogue is summarized as follows:

1. People (in an IRMC) act purposefully to realize authentic self-expression. This should be assumed, if there is a conflict.

2. To realize authentic self-expression, the Transformative Dialogue is indispensable. Relationships of social recognition are necessary for authentic self-expression. It is possible that an identity-related coordination problem arises with someone with whom a person maintains relationships of social recognition. The only way to solve this while

maintaining autonomy (of both) is the Transformative Dialogue. If one did not have the commitment to resolve that coordination problem, then one's recognition of the other is conditional, or only present as long as the other has no conflicting commitments with one's own self-understanding. However, that is not a mutual relationship of recognition.

3. This commitment to the Transformative Dialogue also applies universally, that is in relation to everyone. If the commitment were limited to one person, there could be manipulation. The only way to expose any manipulation and to guarantee autonomy is to be committed to the Transformative Dialogue in relation to everyone else.

The practice of a transformative-deliberative society

A philosophical theory in which stable and just solutions for IRMCs can be discerned is important. This provides a conceptual foundation for transformative initiatives and makes it possible to research the design and effectiveness of such initiatives in an unambiguous manner. This may lead to new insights to increase the effectiveness of such initiatives, enabling them to develop into robust and widely applicable interventions in the repertoire of conflict resolution methods. The hope is that this will cause existing IRMCs to disappear and new ones to be nipped in the bud at an early stage.

At the same time, a theory is just a theory, and these are hopeful thoughts. Agonist critics might accuse the transformative approach of being as naive as the deliberative wishful thinkers who hope to resolve conflicts through the exchange of rational arguments. And indeed, the exercise of power and violence are still the order of the day in the world. The theory of the Transformative Dialogue is therefore not an end point, but a beginning. It marks the starting point for the invention and construction of a transformative-deliberative society.

In chapter 7 I investigate how the Transformative Dialogue can be institutionalized in a transformative-deliberative society, and how oppressive exercise of power can be avoided. A transformative-deliberative society is a society in which social conflicts are resolved through rational argumentation or negotiation and, if they are identity-related, through the application of the Transformative Dialogue. In such a society, discerning each other's self-understanding and transforming it, is as common an interaction as exchanging arguments. In order to solve IRMCs, it is therefore necessary to maintain the transformative skills that people possess naturally as children, also in their adulthood.

To achieve this, innovations are needed in various institutions. The Transformative Dialogue can be embedded in the judiciary, political decision making and community building. This requires, for example, that sufficient process facilitators are trained and that children learn to distinguish their transformative skills and thus to lay the foundation for consciously using these skills as adults if a conflict situation or effective cooperation requires this.

The required institutionalization demands an extensive and complex policy program. Parties that are influential through oppressive exercise of power benefit from maintaining the myth of a fixed identity and will resist this institutionalization. Moreover, this discredited idea of a fixed identity gives people something to hold on to in an increasingly complex and rapidly changing globalized world.

This dissertation provides theoretical underpinnings and a starting point for institutionalization in practice, but much work is needed to create a transformative-deliberative society in which conflicts can be swiftly resolved and effective cooperation can be achieved in the face of clashing identity differences. We must urgently take on this challenge. IRMCs can lead to a lot of suffering. And major global challenges, such as combating climate change, protecting biodiversity and preventing famine, require effective cooperation despite major differences in fundamental values. The future of humanity may well depend on our ability to conduct a Transformative Dialogue.

Quaestiones Infinitae

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