



## Questions of Identity

### **Introduction**

This issue provides a very short selection of papers presented at the international and interdisciplinary conference “Questions of Identity” (held in Cres, September 19–22, 2010 as the main theme of the 19<sup>th</sup> *Days of Frane Petrić*). There were more than hundred lectures given by: philosophers, including experts in ethics, logic, aesthetics, and all who strive to exceed the narrow professional framework of a discipline – philosophers of all relevant orientations, both continental and Anglo-Saxon; sociologists and anthropologists who conduct research on social or anthropological dimensions of identity and who strive to reflect on the results and insights obtained from their research; researchers in the field of culture who are expected to consider the cultural dimensions of identity issues; political scientists and other researchers in the field of social sciences who can make valuable contributions considering political, economic and other social aspects of the problems of identity; theology and religion experts who are faced with identity questions in the context of fundamentalism, relativism and syncretism, as well as uses and abuses of religious identity for secular purposes; researchers in the field of natural sciences who can make contributions regarding naturalistic aspects of identity; researchers in the field of engineering disciplines who ponder on technical and technological dimensions of identity formation in the world of both today and tomorrow; artists and art theorists who can contribute by providing significant insights into specific formation of identity by means of artistic practice.

The real circumstances (primarily those regarding the quantity of space on disposition for this purpose) unfortunately limited the number of published articles. But we hope that this selection could give an approximate illustration of the width and nature of this conference. The future publication of a proceedings book with all papers which were presented on the conference will give a complete image of the intellectual exchange which happened during the conference.

Questions about identity are as old as philosophy itself. Remaining within the framework of Western tradition, take for instance Aristotle, who starts from the assumptions underpinning earlier philosophy to ground the basic law of thinking and being precisely on identity, the law which pertains to both form (logic) and content (onto-theo-cosmo-anthropo-logical). The identity of being with itself refers not only to individual human beings or particular entities or objects, but also all dimensions of genera and species, all supra-individual forms (interpersonal and collective), as well as complex relationships between the formations of individual (*I*) and group (*We*) identities. The question of identity in this sense becomes one of the central problems of both theoretical and practical philosophy, being thereby in no way exhausted, because the issue of identity constitutively refers to all dimensions of life in the broadest sense. Because of that, whoever reflects upon one’s own activity beyond mere functionalistic or pragmatic evaluation of the effects of science, technology

and arts is inevitably faced with the consequences of identity questions. Our joint intellectual effort could lead us to more acute insights into both the reality of contemporary times and the future perspective of humankind. Question of identity has inasmuch constitutive (especially methodological and epistemological) importance for every field of scientific research, even though it naturally depends on specificities of a discipline and the subject matter, whereby that specificity disables mechanical subsumption of the issue under unique patterns, at the very same time pointing to the need for searching the shared part within identity issues and to the consequences of possible answers (theoretical, practical, and applicable).

The roots of modern age can be traced back to Descartes' focal positioning of the question about individual identity, but also to Rousseau's opposition to absolutism on behalf of the free and equal citizenship ideal (formulated by means of an identity theory based on process dynamics between concepts *volonté de tous* and *volonté générale*), as well as to antithetical versions of the democratic system founded on the proclaimed identity of interests of an entire political community through decisions made by majority (Locke, Kant). The world that was formed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and that is being dynamically reshaped is nowadays marked by endless (and often confusing) complexity of identity. Both the absolutization of group identities (that are necessarily partial), which resulted in totalitarian systems of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and in fundamentalist views especially visible in our days, in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, and the crisis of identity (primarily personal, but also interpersonal and collective dimensions of identity) indicate well enough that classical definition of identity given by Leibniz (»two objects or entities are identical if they have all their properties in common«) can no longer be held adequate. Even if the conclusion that the mentioned problems of identity abuses (promulgating a partial identity as a social or even metaphysical absolute) arise from the inadmissible promotion of the particular to the rang of the absolutely universal can be deemed plausible, it would still not answer the question why the mentioned absolutization took place or why it – though in different shapes and contexts – still appears in ever newer and less recognizable shapes. That conclusion would to an even lesser degree be able to provide a magical key to questions about roots and modalities of the processes that are evident in the so-called contemporary personal identity crisis. It could more significantly be of use in dealing with the plurality of identities, while it is of limited use when considering not only ethical dimension of the relationship between individual and super-individual (interpersonal, social, collective) identity, but also the effects of the penetrating cultural and moral relativism evident in the lack of recognition of real identity issues, which results in the creation of a series of false alternatives that are increasingly pervading the media and public space, but also the spaces of philosophy, social theory, and sciences. It is very questionable whether the mentioned conclusion could serve as a guide in pronouncing numerous questions of identity that have recently been raised onto the levels of bioethical, gender, cultural, postcolonial and other research attempts.

Through rethinking the main problems regarding the question of identity we also could understand misuse of the notion of truth in the construction of certain collective identities. The fundamental model of the production of non-inclusive identities is construed by the identification of some particular quality with the universality, followed by the dogmatic proclamation of thus construed identities as indisputable truths. This process of identification of the particular with the universal was present even in ancient times, but it ex-

presses itself fully only in the modern times (primarily in the so-called totalitarian ideologies) as well as in the post-modern typologies of the processes of building individual (too individualistic) and collective identities.

It is however not questionable that the absolutization of any discipline, approach, philosophical or theoretical position (and especially any identity) cannot serve to lead us out of the vicious circle of quasi-dilemmas, misshapen social metaphysics and antithetically joint (only seemingly conflicting) ideologies. Therefore, pluriperspectivist approach is imposed as a way that – if anything – promises to rightly set the problem.

Pluriperspectivism clearly implies multidisciplinary and interdisciplinarity, not the classical one, which among other things marked the early years of the *Days of Frane Petrić*, but a new interdisciplinarity ever more marked by the affirmation of pluriperspectivism at newer conferences. The presented papers confirm that the conference gave a contribution to the affirmation of non-dogmatic and pluriperspectivistic approach to main problems of humankind in our epoch.

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