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Canada's "Respect Project" Poses Some Questions About Groups

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Title: Canada's "Respect Project" Poses Some Questions About Groups

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Abstract. Canada's online Respect Project is mainly concerned with ethical, logical, epistemological, social, and cultural topics. It aims at the integral respect of cultures and persons and can be accessed at http://pages.infinet.net/provyvon/index_eng.html. Its director, Yvon Provencal, Ph.D., posed the following questions about groups to IBPP. IBPP considers these questions of high import because the philosophy and psychology of groups can inform salient political issues--e.g., ethnic conflict.

Question #1. Is it possible that two groups (or societies or cultures) which have similar customs, beliefs, morals, etc., be considered nevertheless as two really distinct groups? In other words, are they one group or two groups?

One answer to this question is that the very perception of two distinct groups denotes two distinct groups. That is, there's a phenomenology-based reality. And this phenomenology can have significant causal effects on behaviors of those who are in this phenomenological space and by those who must confront such behaviors. The latter may not have previously perceived two distinct groups but do so after confronting the behaviors of those people who already do perceive in this matter. In fact, the issue of whether phenomenologically-based reality is commensurate with ontologically-based reality in this case may become moot through the behavioral consequences of phenomenologically-based reality.

Another answer might be that even two groups that share all group class characteristics--e.g., beliefs, customs--still are "really" two groups for they may differ in spatio-temporal coordinates that engender a phenomenologically valid and ontologically valid distinctness. This is especially the case if spatio-temporal attributes are considered characteristics by the perceived and the perceived.

Question #2. If they are two groups, is it right to call them "two numerically but not qualitatively, different groups?"

The biggest problem with differentiating "numerically" from "qualitatively" is that these descriptors necessarily are ripped from a context. The context would dictate whether, for example, "qualitative" applies only to intrinsic characteristics of an entity or also other characteristics that the entity's interaction with other elements and fields of an environment would elicit. Without the context, one can become imbued with a misassumption--similar to that among people who believe that genetic cloning necessarily results in identical organisms.

Question #3. If it is right to say that two different groups may exist that are not "qualitatively different," is it right to say that the concept of "numerical difference" is relevant to social science?

The physical, life, social, and behavioral sciences all distinguish between quantitative and qualitative analysis. This long-term distinction has been based on its relevance--i.e., utility--to science in the processes of understanding, explaining, and predicting. "Not qualitatively different" groups do not seem to challenge the paradigmatic components of science that value quantitative differences.

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Question #4. Do you think the concept of "numerical difference" is relevant to social science and, maybe, important to explain some grave conflicts between human groups?

The social psychology of conflict suggests that larger and smaller groups of the "same" are imbued with very different properties--e.g., the four monsters versus many more monsters of a nightmare, the five percent versus sixty percent of a population for or against legislation proscribing hate crimes.

(See Belke, T.W. (1998). Qualitatively different reinforcers and parameters of Herrnstein's response-strength equation. *Animal Learning and Behavior*, 26, 235-242; Eme, P.E., & Marquer, J. (1998). Quantitative and qualitative individual differences in visual comparison processing: Are strategies only analytic or holistic? *Personality and Individual Differences*, 25, 459-475; Priel, B. (1998). Beyond neutrality and embeddedness: A psychoanalytic reading of detective fiction. *Journal of the American Academy of Psychoanalysis*, 26, 443-456; Smith, C.M., Tindale, R.S., & Dugoni, B.L. (1996). Minority and majority influence in freely interacting groups: Qualitative versus quantitative differences. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 35, 137-149.) (Keywords: Groups, Numerical Differences, Qualitative Differences, Respect Project.)