

Article

Practices of Tolerance: The Significance of Common Sense in Settings of Dense Coexistence

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Abstract: Deriving from the growing cultural and religious diversity in Germany and the need for educational professionals to be able to deal with heterogeneous groups and communicate to children about how to coexist peacefully with others, this essay focuses on the relationship between common sense and tolerance, particularly in places of inescapable dense coexistence characterised by religious and cultural diversity. Using institutions of preschool and primary education as an example, the extent to which peaceful coexistence and conflict resolution is borne by common sense and supported by practices of tolerance is discussed. Subsequently, the significance of a common-sense approach to practices of tolerance for conceptualising ethical judgement in intercultural and inter-religious education is explored. The article closes with thoughts on the contribution of religious ethics to questions of human coexistence in highly dense and conflict-ridden contexts and briefly addresses aspects of Protestant social ethics.

Keywords: tolerance; common sense; coexistence; diversity; heterogeneity; conflict; consensus; social practices; ethical judgement; religious ethics



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1. Introduction

Society in Germany is experiencing growing cultural and religious diversity. In 2022, around 26.6 per cent of the population in Germany had a migrant background ([Federal Statistical Office 2024](#)).¹ As a consequence of living in a heterogeneous society, there is a growing need for skills to coexist peacefully with others. In order to interact and communicate effectively and appropriately, people need to develop intercultural competences fundamentally based on attitudes like respect, openness, curiosity and withholding judgment, as prominently suggested by [Deardorff \(2006\)](#). These competences should already be fostered at an early age: Zakin argues that “the capability to get along with others in a multicultural community is an essential life skill that must be explicitly taught in school” and “that teaching tolerance and social justice is best initiated when children are young” ([Zakin 2012](#), p. 3; see also [Stevens and Charles 2005](#), pp. 17–25). Taking a study conducted by Nathalie Lichy in 2023 into account, this appears even more relevant: Cultural and religious diversity was nominally pronounced in 21 randomly selected nurseries in three major West German cities (Frankfurt, Mannheim, Stuttgart) and one major East German city (Berlin). Six nurseries had a migration percentage of less than 50 per cent, four nurseries had a migration percentage of over 50 and up to 80 per cent and eleven nurseries had a migration percentage of over 80 per cent, with Islam being the predominant religious affiliation ([Lichy 2023](#), p. 133ff). In contrast, there was only a comparatively small number with a migrant background among specialised educational staff ([Lichy 2023](#), p. 137ff). Primary schools in Germany are experiencing growing linguistic, cultural and religious diversity and heterogeneity, similar to nurseries ([Kürzinger et al. 2022](#), pp. 143–52; See also [Bohl et al. 2017](#)). Teachers and other educational professionals are nowadays not

only tasked with imparting attitudes that help people get along with others but also with developing their own intercultural and inter-religious competences to deal with respective heterogeneity in their classrooms.

Based on these thoughts, triennial development and research into a blended learning course for the inter-religious–intercultural competence development of teacher students in the subject of religion was conducted as part of the “Qualitätsoffensive Lehrerbildung” (Quality development program for teacher education: QLB II), funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (TU Braunschweig 2023). During this research, we found that the significance of the “sensus communis” within practices of tolerance in potentially conflicting settings is not well elaborated—if at all—in concepts and trainings related to inter-religious and intercultural competence.² These concepts or trainings feature a wide variety of competences, such as adaptability, flexibility and empathy (Deardorff 2006, pp. 241–66) and the abilities to develop a plurality-sensitive position (Schambeck 2013, p. 174) or to manage inter-religious conflicts (Willems 2011). However, the capacity to embark on practices that constitute the “environment” as a “common world” in which people align with others, namely, their “sensus communis”, widely remains unreflected. Deardorff indeed states that it is “important [...] that we renew our efforts in learning how to live together” (Deardorff 2020b, p. 15) and gives examples of perspective-taking, altruism and collective thinking. However, the *sensus communis* also remains unexplored in her studies. Further literature about intercultural competence even shows examples of common sense not being useful in intercultural communication by citing Carla Vankoughnett, who states that “In a world of cultural differences. . . there’s no such thing as ‘common sense’” (Lantz-Deaton and Golubeva 2020, p. 61), or by stating that common sense misleads to concede one “logical process” to all cultures (Bennett 1986, p. 190). We therefore focus particularly on the contribution of common sense to the coexistence of people with diverse religious and cultural backgrounds.³ The contours that the notoriously ambivalent (Forst 2008, pp. 14–21)⁴ and paradoxically charged⁵ concept of tolerance take on through its reference to common sense in social practices and what this means for religious ethics in a world riddled with conflicts is the subject of this article.

In the following, we will examine the distinction between consensus and common sense (2) and the relationship between common sense and tolerance regarding coexistence in places of inescapable proximity under the conditions of religious, cultural and ideological diversity (3). We are citing institutions of preschool and primary education as examples, where performance expectations do not yet take precedence over learning to live together. We will show the extent to which coexistence here is borne by common sense and supported by practices of tolerance among children and adults and explore the significance of a common-sense approach to practices of tolerance in concepts of intercultural and inter-religious ethics and education (4). The article closes by considering the potential contribution of religious ethics to questions of human coexistence in highly dense and conflict-ridden contexts and briefly addresses aspects of Protestant social ethics (5). Finally, we draw a conclusion (6).

2. On the Distinction between Consensus and Common Sense

Thinking of Rawls’ principles of justice as the basis of well-ordered societies reminds us that “justice is the first virtue of social institutions” (Rawls 1971, p. 3), especially in places of concentrated coexistence that must be determined by principles of fairness—such as Rawls’ principles of freedom, equality and difference (Rawls 1971, p. 42)⁶—otherwise, conflicts dominate. The concept of a “well-ordered society” is certainly not the first thought in the throng of a nursery’s playground or on a school’s courtyard. Yet, all these children, pupils, parents and educational professionals fill the confined spaces available to them and granted to each other with movements that cannot be consistently standardised or presented in a rule-based manner (Schneider 1996). The interaction contexts at nurseries, schools and other institutions of dense coexistence are only outlined. They are open, undiscovered terrains full of potential conflicts (Schneider 1992, p. 542). Here, peaceful

coexistence is not based solely on an explicit consensus on rules of fairness, as if those involved were constantly verifying their actions, but sustained by an interweaving of cognitive performance with sensory performance within well-rehearsed social practices, through which the participants—children and adults alike—jointly fill the available scope of action.

In such practices, people follow rules; they do not just obey them (Schneider 2012, pp. 17–28).⁷ According to Hubert Dreyfus, the fact that people can find their way in contexts for which they have no or only a few fixed rules and can creatively refer to rules that have been tried and tested in other fields of practice or change these rules is one of the key elements of human intelligence (Dreyfus 1992). People can and must find out how to move sensibly in non-rule-based areas of practice with a mixture of calculation and imagination by using rules and combining them with their spontaneity, with the ability to act without being guided by rules (Schneider 1992, p. 15). They do this by grasping such condensed social spaces as a “common world” with the help of their common sense (Latin: *sensus communis*)⁸, as Hannah Arendt pointedly described in her two “Crisis Essays” (Arendt 1968a, 1968b):

“Common sense which the French so suggestively call the ‘good sense’, *le bon sens*, discloses to us the nature of the world insofar as it is a common world; we owe to it the fact that our strictly private and ‘subjective’ five senses and their sensory data can adjust themselves to a nonsubjective and ‘objective’ world which we have in common and share with others.” (Arendt 1968a, p. 221)

Understanding interaction environments as a “common world” is a prerequisite for tolerance. This perspective offers people a multitude of social practices that are unregulated in their use and that need to be consciously perceived, interpreted and forbearingly evaluated. Hence, the know-how that people need in order to move appropriately and peacefully in environments of dense coexistence is not only evolving from rule-based behaviour but also from common sense-based practices.

When coexistence becomes unavoidable, as at nursery or at school, it requires not only a fundamental consensus on fair rules that apply to everyone and that guide action, but also the common sense of those who can move with justice in a common world of shared practices. Whether coexistence succeeds in dense and diverse contexts depends on practices that are based on the “common sense” of each individual, in which the question of tolerance arises differently than in consensus-based interactions.

3. Tolerance between Rejection, Forbearance and Recognition

The fact that tolerance can smack of contempt and devaluation of the tolerated person is the subject of Goethe’s much-quoted criticism of tolerance: “Tolerance should actually only be a temporary attitude: it must lead to recognition. To tolerate means to offend” (Goethe 1981, p. 507).⁹ In recent decades, social theory has followed this path of critique of “mere” toleration, leading to a “widespread turn from tolerance to recognition” (Vainio and Visala 2016, p. 554) with the development of various power-critical, identity-sensitive and acceptance-oriented concepts (Mendus 1989).¹⁰ This shift from tolerance to recognition can also be observed in contemporary intercultural and inter-religious pedagogy.¹¹ Axel Honneth’s theory of recognition, one of the most elaborate concepts of recognition in social philosophy, understands recognition as a normative criterion for the degree of social freedom that attempts to overcome misrecognition and rejection (Honneth 1995). It allows for a complex inter-relation between liberal concepts of tolerance and communitarian concepts of recognition (Hansteen 2014). Yet, it does not conceptualise the practices of tolerance that allow people to simply get along with others in heterogeneous groups without specific demands of recognition or consensus. Nevertheless, these practices are required precisely where coexistence must function permanently without full political, cultural, social or emotional recognition and without occasions for explicit dialogue between religiously and culturally diverse people. As important as the criticism of tolerance and the emphasis on recognition is, it threatens to lose sight of how much freedom and justice the practices of

tolerance facilitate in various social contexts that we encounter in everyday life, e.g., at nursery, at school and among work colleagues or relatives.

“Tolerance” is therefore rightly still a component and target perspective of numerous concepts of intercultural and inter-religious learning¹², although the current state of research regarding the effects of school lessons or prevention programmes on changing tolerance-related attitudes appears ambiguous (Domínguez et al. 2023; see also Sandoval-Hernández et al. 2018; Ritzer 2010; Beelmann 2018, pp. 9–27). The wide range of assessments and study results depends heavily on the respective concept of tolerance, which remains unclear. In this regard, Rainer Forst’s socio-philosophical analyses of the concept of tolerance point out an inherent ambivalence of the concept of tolerance with an interplay of acceptance and rejection of the other (Forst 2004, 2017a, 2017b) and distinguish the following four concepts of tolerance:

- The “permission conception”, whereby a more powerful social majority tolerates the deviating values of a minority as long as they do not exceed the limits set by the more powerful group.
- The “coexistence conception”, in which individuals or groups in power-symmetrical constellations practice tolerance as a *modus vivendi* in the interest of avoiding conflict.
- The “respect conception” of tolerance, in which the tolerant parties respect the equal freedom and the equal rights of the other members of a legally constituted community in the sense of formal equality or of qualitative equality sensitive to the form of life.
- The “esteem conception”, in which certain ideological, cultural and religious differences between the tolerant parties are mutually appreciated as valuable and certain other aspects of the different way of life are rejected.¹³

In the debates on educational and political ethics—given a unanimous criticism of the “permission conception”—reference is made above all to the “respect conception” and the “coexistence conception” of tolerance, whereby the discourse can characteristically be divided into the following two currents:

- Liberalist currents prefer the “respect conception”. They may draw primarily on the work of John Rawls, who sees in two fairness principles, namely, the principle of liberty and equality and the principle of difference, an “overarching consensus” as the basis of social integration in the face of pluralism of conflicting doctrines of the good life (Rawls 1993, p. 144f). To elevate these intuitive foundations of well-ordered societies to the rank of a public conception of justice and to further stabilise pluralistic societies, Rawls takes the path of the public use of reason. Thus, the principles of justice and the well-considered judgements of individuals shall be balanced. What applies to coexistence and political tolerance in democratic constitutional states according to Rawls does of course not necessarily apply to the same extent to coexistence in social life contexts with inescapable proximity such as nurseries, schools or specific workplaces. However, a clever *modus vivendi* and a “prudential tolerance” (Höffe 2000, p. 74) that is more modest in terms of its demands for consensus or recognition often appear to be deficient from the perspective of concepts of tolerance which—like Rawls himself or Jürgen Habermas—emphasise that tolerance relates primarily to consensus (Habermas 2008, pp. 251–70).
- Communitarian currents refer primarily to the “coexistence conception” of tolerance. As a prominent protagonist of this current, Michael Walzer has developed the concept of tolerance under the premise of a “politics of difference”, whereby tolerance is a *modus vivendi* of culturally and religiously diversified groups whose interest is not in overarching coexistence, but in self-preservation (Walzer 1997; see also Walzer 2000, pp. 214–30). Walzer thus makes the acceptance of differences the basic category of coexistence. Unlike Charles Taylor, another protagonist of a politics of difference, Walzer turns tolerance from an exception into a rule of social coexistence between groups (Bubner 2000, pp. 45–59). At the interpersonal level, however, the sensorium of the actors involved is not only focused on the perception of differences but also on the perception of similarities and positive aspects of other ways of life in the sense of Forst’s

“esteem conception” of tolerance. Walzer’s concept of tolerance faces difficulties in adequately reflecting the multidimensionality of tolerance constellations in the coexistence of people. Without forbearance, living together within heterogeneous groups would not be possible. However, a comprehensive understanding of tolerance includes the aspect of selectively appreciating differences and finding oneself in others.

Thus, while an emphasis on consensus in general principles of coexistence appears to be fundamental to liberalist concepts of tolerance, an emphasis on difference is characteristic of communitarian concepts of tolerance. However, the consensus-oriented concepts of tolerance developed for pluralistic communities are too rich in procedural prerequisites for contexts in which everyday coexistence in social practices is central, while the difference-oriented concepts of tolerance are in danger of normatively fixing identity constructions and stigmatising attributions instead of criticising or deconstructing them (Drerup 2022, pp. 40–57).

Having elaborated that trainings on inter-religious and intercultural competences as well as socio-philosophical concepts of tolerance and of recognition lacks an appropriate reference to common sense as a prerequisite for the possibility of getting along with others in a common world, we now turn explicitly to institutions of preschool and primary education. Will these contexts of the moral and social education of children conceptually reflect this very basic element of practicing tolerance that is needed in adulthood?

4. Practices of Tolerance in Dense Contexts of Cultural and Religious Diversity: The Example of Educational Institutions

In contexts of dense coexistence, tolerance means remaining attentive to other people, e.g., assessing when it is better to leave a person alone; when to keep how much distance; when it is better to practice ignorance to counteract anger; when to overlook insensitivity, some peculiarities or strange behaviour; when to take differences with humour; and when to work towards acceptance, recognition or consensus. Here, social practices are characterised by a rich composition of forbearance that enables peaceful coexistence under conditions of linguistic, social, cultural and religious diversity and heterogeneity. Given the growing diversity in educational institutions in societies that include growing numbers of immigrants, the question of what constitutes living together in justice appears to be of particular relevance (Macleod 2010, pp. 9–21).¹⁴

To concretise our considerations, we now turn to the example of preschool and primary education in Germany. Being predominantly oriented towards togetherness, educational work in nurseries and primary schools is fundamentally related to coexistence as its own task. Under conditions of cultural and religious diversity, this task can become particularly acute. In most nurseries and elementary schools in metropolitan areas, children, parents and educational professionals enter a shared world in which proximity, contact and confrontation within socio-culturally and religiously often very heterogeneous groups are an unavoidable part of living together. Provided there are no selective admission requirements, these institutions usually reflect the social composition of their catchment area to a certain extent.

Dealing with diversity and heterogeneity in preschool and primary education is subject to numerous educational research studies including critical discourse on the discriminating effects of such a specific focus (Budde 2015, pp. 19–37) and concepts on teaching tolerance in nurseries (Zakin 2012, pp. 3–13; see also Hawkins 2014, pp. 723–38; Cohen 2006, pp. 201–37), ranging from art-making activities in preschool settings (Zakin 2012, p. 3) to respect-based conceptions of toleration (Macleod 2010), concepts of “embodied tolerance” (Mamlök 2023, pp. 231–46) or trainings on tolerance as a democratic virtue (Drerup 2021, pp. 108–31).

All this research agrees that social practices associated with the dense coexistence of different people require a high degree of tolerance, which not only refers to an explicit consensus on the rules of coexistence, but also builds on a mix of emotional, aesthetic, social and cognitive competences that are acquired through life experiences—starting from

an early age which need to be continuously cultivated. However, the question of how and when children develop and apply their *sensus communis*, understood as the ability to perceive and judge social reality as a shared world, remains unresolved and maybe even unresolvable. There are no conceptual answers to the question of how far the rich variety of skills and competencies which are brought forward in educational concepts or programmes may root in a specific human “sense” and how this “common sense” serves to share a world of social practices with others at all, including practices of direct tolerance in conflictual constellations of coexistence.

Below the high threshold of consensus, i.e., explicit and mutual agreement on rules that apply to everyone and social, legal and emotional recognition, common sense is needed to enable the coexistence of people living together in a common world. In all places of dense coexistence, consensus and recognition are needed, but practices of immediate tolerance are also required from people who have learnt or are learning to use their common sense and get along with others—even with those with whom they disagree and whose beliefs, attitudes and practices they do not consistently recognise or even refuse. This brings tolerance in the sense of practicing forbearance into focus: Tolerance is required “precisely where the behaviour of others seems absurd, goes against the grain or is repugnant to us—and yet we have reason to bear it” (Seel 2012, p. 123). This reason may lie in the realisation that we simply cannot avoid another person in this life context. To enable us to live together in justice, it may sometimes be necessary to simply give space to other people. At the same time, however, it is about looking for common ground in convictions and ways of life.

In dense forms of coexistence, all actors interact with the tools of their common sense, through which commonalities and differences in living together are identified and balanced. The forbearance and acceptance of heterogeneous convictions, idiosyncrasies and practices should not be underestimated in terms of their integrative effect on coexistence in dense and conflict-prone social spheres. However, to ensure that this form of tolerance does not mutate into indifference, it remains bound to the ethical problem of justice and thus to ethical judgement and the associated learning processes. The *sensus communis* includes not only the agreement with general rules of political coexistence but also a diverse search for common grounds in diversity and a corresponding practice of justice. For ethics, it is significant that coexistence remains linked to the task of discerning how people move meaningfully within their life forms and their corresponding practices to do justice to this reality. Hence, practices of tolerance imply the power of judgement.

Hannah Arendt understood it as a characteristic of human judgement under the sign of common sense that judgement connects us as a mental activity with other judging people, whose points of view the power of judgement incorporates in interaction with their access to the world (Arendt [1970] 1998, p. 91). The contribution of common sense to ethical judgement therefore consists of opening up the world of life as a common world, (Arendt [1954] 1994, pp. 307–27) “Judging is one, if not the most, important activity in which this sharing the world with others come to pass” (Arendt 1968a, p. 221).

Our judgements are based on the perception of the reality that affects us and do not necessarily lead us into a closed subjectivity but open up a shared world of coexistence using common sense (Schauer 2023; see also Weinman 2023). This does not simply exist but becomes real, present and tangible through certain social practices of understanding, discernment and judgement in which the various dimensions of tolerance converge. Common sense thus directs ethical judgement towards a common world shared by people and other entities, whereby viable, sustainable and also new ways of coexistence emerge (Ulrich 2012, pp. 41–59).

5. The Contribution of Religious Ethics to Practices of Tolerance in a Conflicted World

If we follow Hannah Arendt, the ability of human beings to perceive their life with other people as a shared world is indispensable in the ethical sense. It can be realised in every interpersonal encounter whenever common sense guides perception and judgement

and opens up the world as a shared one—a world to be constituted and explored through social practices to which tolerance intrinsically belongs in the interplay of its components described above. People are free to view their environment as a shared world and apply social practices such as tolerance, but they may just as well refrain from doing so. Therefore, the crucial question is whether and how institutions of the common life can contribute to constituting and sustaining practices of tolerance and whether religions with their tendency towards intolerance, social exclusion and violence can be considered suitable candidates for this task at all (Assmann 2010; Schmidt-Salomon et al. 2012, pp. 62–65).

In Protestant theology, which we take up as an example of religious attempts to place the idea of tolerance at the heart of religious ethics, this problematic heritage has led to the reformulation of theological key concepts: Faith in a God does not legitimise one's own truth claims or one's superiority over people of other faiths, but on the contrary reserves truth for God himself and views others as created equal and subjects of God's care (Grümme 2017). Religious pedagogics hence orbits around the perception of a shared world of equal creatures who are all dignified by God's salvific will which they are invited to explore within specific forms and practices of their social lives (Englert 1995, pp. 161–77; Schweitzer and Schwöbel 2007).

Following this theological approach, Protestant social ethics has reflected on social institutions as contexts of interaction which are provided with theological "mandates". In this way of thinking about specific social contexts as mandates or institutions¹⁵, these contexts are understood as places where people may encounter and give way to God's preserving, creative and transformative will, thereby realising the original meaning of a common, social life.

Political institutions can thus be characterised as places of emancipation from the practices of domination or of violence, economic institutions as places of liberation from abysmal concern and religious institutions as places where the domination of people over other people is refracted and the contours of coexistence in justice become visible.

Understood in this way, institutions structure social reality in such a way that people move within them on the trail of critical, transformative practices and open up new ways of living together in justice. In this religious tradition of thinking about the social, tuning into reality as a common world bears the signature of a double freedom: a freedom from dependence on other people and a freedom to live in a common world. This freedom depends on people realising that (and to what extent) their lives are supported and preserved. The external freedom to coexist depends on the institutional conditions that Rawls describes as a well-ordered society. The inner freedom to do so has prerequisites that people cannot control. One of these conditions is a person's trust that their life is well protected. On the basis of this trust, people can allow themselves to coexist with others in justice. They may then even turn to others to find out if and how those others can be included in the good gifts that they have received. In the tradition of Protestant ethics, this is referred to as "iustitia passiva", through which people are called into the "status politicus", a process of ever-new vocation from concern for one's own existence into the practices of "iustitia civilis", living together with others in justice.¹⁶

Despite the caution required by the toxic connection between religiosity and intolerance (Augustin et al. 2006; Schockenhoff 2014, pp. 465–75), especially in the context of Protestant ethics and its history (Seiverth 2013, pp. 24–26; Grethlein 2013, pp. 18–23), this way of ethical thinking offers resources that may contribute to fostering practices of tolerance in educational institutions and elsewhere. Its emancipatory drive and emphasis on immediate justice complement Hannah Arendt's notion of *sensus communis* as the constituting element of a common life in justice. Religious faith in the "tolerantia Dei", God's tolerance with his creation and its creatures, may thus contribute to the social practices through which people tolerate each other.

6. Conclusions

In this article, we focus on the relationship between common sense and tolerance, particularly in places of inescapable dense coexistence characterised by religious and cultural diversity. We argue that in such condensed social spaces, peaceful coexistence is not based solely on an explicit consensus on rules of fairness but is also sustained by an interweaving of cognitive performance with sensory performance within social practices, through which people jointly fill the available scope of action. This ability to move sensibly in non-rule-based areas of practice with a mixture of calculation and imagination by using rules and combining them with spontaneity is guided by common sense (*sensus communis*). Following Hannah Arendt, we claim that common sense is a fundamental prerequisite for social practices by helping to grasp interaction environments as a common world of shared practices. By revealing the significance of common sense within practices of tolerance, we show that socio-philosophical concepts of tolerance and training on inter-religious and intercultural competence miss the identification of common sense as a prerequisite for the ability of getting along with others. Given the growing cultural and religious diversity in societies that include immigrants and the predominant orientation towards togetherness in institutions of preschool and primary education, we refer to nurseries and elementary schools as examples of the unavoidable dense coexistence of heterogeneous groups. From an early age, people need to learn how to get along with others and how to practice tolerance and social justice. However, the related competencies need to be continuously cultivated throughout adulthood. As Hannah Arendt stated, the ability of human beings to perceive their life with other people as a shared world can be realised in every interpersonal encounter whenever common sense guides ethical judgement and opens up the world as a shared one—a world that is constituted and explored through social practices to which tolerance intrinsically belongs. We therefore argue that ethical judgement directed by common sense needs to be an intrinsic part of training on inter-religious and intercultural competence. With a view on the toxic connection between religiosity and intolerance, we finally ask whether religious ethics may contribute to the development of such competencies. We conclude that Protestant ethical thinking offers resources that may contribute to practices of tolerance among human coexistence in highly dense and conflict-ridden contexts by fostering perceptions of a shared world of equal creatures whose social life is guided by faith in God's own tolerance.

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Notes

- 1 In the same year, the religious and ideological distribution in Germany was as follows: around 24.8 per cent were members of the Catholic Church, 22.6 per cent were members of the Protestant church, 3.7 per cent were denominational Muslims, 5.1 per cent belonged to other religious communities and 43.8 per cent of the population were non-denominational (Forschungsgruppe Weltanschauungen in Deutschland (fowid) 2023).
- 2 See researches and models by Bennett (1986), Arasaratnam and Doerfel (2005), Perez et al. (2015), Bennett (2017) and Deardorff (2020a).
- 3 Aspects of inter-religious and intercultural *dialogue* are part of our blended-learning concept but are not the focus of this paper. Instead, we will concentrate on settings of high religious diversity that live on practices that facilitate peaceful coexistence rather than explicit dialogue. For more information on activities that foster inter-religious dialogue see Lehmann (2020, pp. 237–54).
- 4 For the rich diversity of concepts see Forst (2000) and Brown and Forst (2014).
- 5 See Popper’s formulation of the paradox of tolerance: “Unlimited tolerance must lead to the disappearance of tolerance. . . We must therefore claim, in the name of tolerance, the right not to tolerate intolerance” (Popper [1945] 2012, p. 581).
- 6 For further development of his principles of justice see Rawls (1993).
- 7 This distinction can be traced back to Ludwig Wittgenstein who insisted that rules neither interpret themselves nor imply the rules for their own application (Wittgenstein 1958). The only way to find out whether one follows a rule correctly is by shared practices (Holtzman and Leich 2014).
- 8 In the following, we are using the terms “common sense” and “sensus communis” interchangeably.
- 9 Our translation.
- 10 See also Taylor (1994) and Galeotti (2002). For an overview on this discussion see Thompson (2006).
- 11 For the international discourse see Vilà, Freixa and Aneas (Vilà et al. 2020, pp. 255–73), Morgan and Sandage (2016, pp. 129–58), Jackson (2005) and Brown (2000, pp. 257–81). For the German-speaking debate see Auernheimer (2012, p. 20f.) and Diehm (2010, pp. 119–39). Concerning “recognition” in religious pedagogy see Orth (2011, pp. 84–111).
- 12 For the international debate see, e.g., Council of Europe (2023), Deardorff (2009) and Leeds-Hurwitz (2013). With regard to the German-speaking debate see the concept of constructive tolerance in religious pedagogics by Adam (1996, pp. 84–96) and the concept of reflexive tolerance by Krimmer (2013). For inter-religious pedagogics see Schweitzer (2014), Englert (1995, pp. 161–77) and Grümme (2017). Regarding the role of tolerance in educational sciences see Drerup (2017, pp. 206–24; 2022, pp. 40–57) and Mikhail (2022, pp. 5–21).
- 13 For a good overview on his concept see Forst (2007, pp. 215–37; 2013; 2017b).
- 14 It needs to be noted that the fixation on diversity or otherness is in danger of contributing to exclusion through othering and stigmatisation dynamics (Mecheril et al. 2010).
- 15 See Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s doctrine of the mandates: “We speak of divine mandates rather than divine orders, because thereby their character as divinely imposed tasks [Auftrag], as opposed to determinate forms of being, becomes clearer.” (Bonhoeffer 2005, p. 68) For more information on Bonhoeffer see the articles in Ziegler and Mawson (2019). Following this critical path of social thought, please see also Ernst Wolf’s theological definition of institutions: “Institutionen sind soziale Daseinsstrukturen der geschaffenen Welt als Einladung Gottes zu ordnender und gestaltender Tat in der Freiheit des Glaubensgehorsams gegen sein Gebot” (Wolf 1988, p. 173).
- 16 For a classical formulation of this ethics see Luther (1520a; 1520b, pp. 20–38).

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