

Research Article

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Equality in view of political correctness, cancel culture and other oxymora

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Abstract: “Political correctness” and “cancel culture” are two concepts frequently invoked to control speech and influence debates with a view to establishing greater equality across the globe. Even though their usage has also been met with criticism, there is a strong merit in these attempts, as language change is indicative of wider cognitive changes that are eventually also transformed into changes in the law and society. Based on the wider trend of a rise in so-called “essentially oxymoronic concepts” in public discourses in general and equality debates in particular, this article proposes to analyse the present linguistic trends in order to better understand the deeper causes and related challenges to legal reasoning posed by “political correctness”, “cancel culture” and other terms that have been qualified as oxymora or paradoxes. Based on the view that oxymora and paradoxes are not mere aspects of language but also expressions of deeper layers of human cognition, the article ponders the need not merely to control the external aspects of language use but also to inquire more deeply into the inner workings of the brain and its underlying cognitive processes. In this endeavour it critically examines the dominant modes of dualistic or dichotomized thinking and binary logic, which – when regarded in isolation – appear to cause most discriminatory acts and violations of the principle of equality.

Keywords: binary logic; cancel culture; discrimination; dualistic thinking; equality; essentially oxymoronic concepts; legal discourse analysis; political correctness

1 Introduction

This was some time a paradox, but now the time gives it proof (Shakespeare 1857: 100).

The inherent equality of all human beings, together with their dignity, forms the cornerstone of the universality of human rights enshrined in international law

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(Smith 2020:186). Correctly or not, equality is also widely believed to be one of the most important criteria on which our wider sense of justice and fairness rests (Sen 1996: 394). Equality has been described over time as “a long-term movement over the course of history toward more social, economic, and political equality” (Piketty 2022: 1). Still today, at the beginning of the twenty-first century and in spite of unprecedented levels of technological and scientific progress and the widespread recognition of the universality of rights, the objectives related to equality have unfortunately been neither completely understood nor fully realized.

One of the main causes of the limited progress being made in the pursuit of global equality and the attempts to end global inequalities and related injustices is, this article argues, rooted in the focus on the external aspects of language use rather than the inner workings of the brain and its underlying cognitive processes. Indeed, language matters and constitutes a powerful tool for influencing society, especially by way of “producing and maintaining powerful relations” (Young and Fitzgerald 2006: 2). More precisely, it has been said that “[I]n all domains of human activity and experience, language profoundly shapes the activity or experience itself; it is not a mere after-the-act labelling” (Toolan 2018: 7). Unfortunately, language, both past and present, also perpetuates or aggravates inequality by hiding “veiled racism, sexism, ableism, lookism, ageism, and other -isms in our everyday language” (Stollznaw 2018: 1). Language is also said to facilitate the maintenance of stereotypes through linguistic biases (Whitley Jr. and Kite 2010: 108). However, an analysis of the role of language in society also requires an inquiry into the underlying cognitive processes and, notably, the logic applied. In concrete terms, it must be asked whether the lack of progress in realizing equality is rooted in the traditional mode of dualistic thinking and the predominant use of binary logic, which are useful because of their simplicity but are also limited and possibly counter-productive when faced with the greater complexity found in reality.

The increasing levels of complexity, and a seeming acceleration of the pace of change, have led, in a response from the cognitive levels, to a wider trend that is noticeable in language and that consists in the recent rise in the use of the rhetorical figures of speech known as “oxymora” and “paradoxes” (Howard 2010: 210; Neuwirth 2018: 234). An oxymoron usually denotes a figure of speech “in which apparently contradictory terms appear in conjunction”, while “paradox” is defined as “a seemingly absurd or self-contradictory statement or proposition that may in fact be true” (Soanes and Stevenson 2008: 1024 and 1037). In essence, these two terms are closely related and sometimes used interchangeably, as an oxymoron has also been defined as “a paradox compressed into a single self-contradicting phrase” (Vendler 1988: 242). They share an inherent tendency to challenge the limits imposed by dualistic thinking and binary logic.

For this reason, and to highlight the underlying cognitive shift since the notion of “essentially contested concepts” was coined in the 1950s, oxymora and paradoxes

have been jointly renamed as “essentially oxymoronic concepts” (Gallie 1956; Neuwirth 2013). Their rise has been noticed in many different fields, initially the arts and then in technology, science, law and day-to-day language. This has earned the present era its description as the “Age of Paradox” (Handy 1995), an era of “perplexing tensions” (Rosenau 1995: 13) or generally a “Time of Oxymora” (Neuwirth 2018). It is also expressed in the term the “Age of Unreality”, in which everything is said to be an oxymoron (Bennis 2009: 403).

The following discussion will show that this wider trend is also noticeable in the debates about equality laws and concepts such as “political correctness” or “cancel culture”, both of which, together with many more concepts related to discrimination such as “positive discrimination” or “gender equality”, have been described as oxymora. In this context, essentially oxymoronic concepts may be regarded as the harbingers of an imminent cognitive change or cognitive revolution, one that will be necessary if the problem of discrimination in all its variety is to be better understood. The reason for this argument is that essentially oxymoronic concepts cause a clash with the traditional and widely dominant dualistic mode of thinking and binary logic (Nisbett 2003: 205; Webb 2020: 702). Moreover, it has been said that “dualism” is stubborn, and that it is hard to “shake off our dualistic way of thinking because it is innate and modular, and innate modular beliefs are extremely hard to shift” (Segal 2008: 101). From the exploration of paradoxes, too, it is known that contradictions are usually interpreted through simple, bipolar concepts, constructing logical, internally consistent sets of abstractions that are separately posited and help to make sense of complex realities but that “are biasing and, once entrenched, become highly resistant to change” (Lewis 2000: 761–2). This is where oxymora and paradoxes indicate a gradual cognitive change, as they not only conflict with dualistic reasoning but also highlight the shortcomings of dualism or bivalent thinking (as opposed to multivalence) in the quest to trade “accuracy for simplicity” (Kosko 1993: 21).

Such subtle changes in language have often reflected underlying changes in cognition, and together these have determined the direction of the evolution of humanity (Harari 2017: 156). This is also reflected in conceptual metaphor theory, which proposes that “metaphor is not just an aspect of language, but a fundamental part of human thought” (Gibbs 2011: 529). More than that, it was also argued that metaphors are not solely a “device of the poetic imagination” but also “pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action” (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 3). Therefore, it is not surprise that changes in language and cognition also lead to changes in action, which is why they have been found to be the precondition for legal and political change and institutional reform (Adler 2019: 137; Lang 2007: 529). This same finding has been confirmed by the saying “law changes as language changes – perhaps because language changes” (Oko 2012: 6). Seen from this angle, oxymora and paradoxes may – as this article aims to show – not only change our

cognition but also provide a source of hope for the future of equality and the necessary related reforms of the present international legal system and legal systems around the world.

2 The rise of “essentially oxymoronic concepts” and legal discourse analysis

The recent linguistic trend of a rise in the use of paradoxes and oxymora in a wide range of fields ranging from the arts to science has also been observed by way of legal discourse in law (Neuwirth 2018). Legal discourse clearly reflects the strong interplay between law and language. As a strongly verbal field, discourse analysis can also provide useful insights in the legal context (Shuy 2001: 437). Reflecting this strong nexus between law and language, the rise in oxymoronic concepts was found to affect not only scholarly works but also the judicial sphere of law (Neuwirth 2018: 66–107). Moreover, since several many new concepts that – due to their double or antagonistic meaning – are qualified as oxymora mark public debates or fierce controversies, it can be expected that they will eventually also be used in legislative proposals and laws. Concepts like “culture industry” (Sinclair 1996: 30), “artificial intelligence” (Gidley 2017: 99), “fake news” (Ireton and Posetti 2018: 7) and “gender equality” (McBride 1999: 68) have already been through that process as they were first qualified as oxymora and later enshrined in laws.¹ Probably, other such concepts will follow this trend soon.

The antagonistic or seemingly contradictory meaning of oxymora, however, causes special problems in the legal realm given law’s traditional adherence to strict rules of dualistic reasoning aided by binary logic. This is where legal discourse analysis is called upon to provide useful insights into the impact of these rhetorical figures of speech on cognition in general and legal reasoning in particular. Legal discourse analysis is generally of great relevance to law, because it can be used “to address the whole spectrum studying legal phenomena” (Cheng and Danesi 2019: 79). It is even of greater interest for the law-making process, which itself can also be considered as “a discursive procedure of construction and definition” that is based on “an antagonistic process involving several social players with different world

¹ See e.g. Article 2012 Canada–United States Free–Trade Agreement (CUSFTA), (1988) 27 I.L.M. 281; Republic of Singapore, Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act 2019 (No. 18 of 2019) (POFMA); Socialist Republic of Vietnam, Law on Gender Equality (Law No.: 73/2006/QH11); and European Commission, *Proposal for a Regulation Laying Down Harmonised Rules on Artificial Intelligence (Artificial Intelligence Act)*, COM (2021) 206 final (21 April 2021).

views, correspondingly various interests as well as different (power) resources” (Stückler 2018: 113).

This characterisation reveals thus a perplexing paradox in the context of law, which lies in the explanation of laws being created out of an antagonistic process on the one hand but then strongly relying on a traditional dualistic mode of reasoning on the other. The reliance on dualistic reasoning in law was best characterised by the following quote:

For the lawyer’s purpose every situation which confronts him is dealt with as falling into one or the other of two categories which are apparently supposed to be mutually exclusive and separated by a sharp boundary (Wheeler Cook 1933: 333).

It is against this background that the rise of oxymoronic concepts creates serious problems, because it seems difficult to reconcile their apparent antagonistic meaning with dual reasoning applied in law. Accordingly, it would be difficult to conceive of a contract to be valid and void or a perpetrator to be guilty and innocent at the same time. However, these apparent contradictions do arise in life as well as in the courtroom, as it can be exemplified by the following two cases involving oxymora.

The first case is *Tesla versus BBC* which concerned the alleged divulgence of “fake news” about a vehicle presented in a well-known television programme called “Top Gear”, in which the judge reasoned as follows:

In some cases whether a statement is true or false may be simply a matter of binary choice: it is either one or the other. In other cases there may be degrees of falsity. It appears that in the present case, even on the Claimant’s case, most of the broadcast is accepted to be true. In respect of those parts of the broadcast which are said to be false, they are said to be false in the sense that they are not wholly true or are exaggerated.²

Put simply, the lines distinguishing the antonyms of true and false can be hard to draw based on binary logic alone.

The second case concerned the appeal by an intersex person against a decision to deny the change of legal gender to the category “inter” by a civil registry office. In this case, the Austrian Constitutional Court faced the dilemma of a binary distinction of gender in female or male and opened a judicial review procedure. The review eventually resulted in the finding that the Personal Status Law (*Personenstandsgesetz*) must not limit the public gender registration to binary options and but must be interpreted to allow for the registration of a third gender category, one other than female or male.³

These are merely two selected cases and many more do exist (Neuwirth 2018: 66–85). These cases confirm that reality is often more contradictory as expected, which

² Royal Courts of Justice (London), *Tesla Motors Ltd v BBC*, [2011] EWHC 2760 (QB).

³ Austrian Constitutional Court (Verfassungsgerichtshof (VfGH)) – G 77/2018–9 (15 June 2018).

means that they do not easily fit within the strict boundaries of dualistic reasoning and binary logic. Further similar problems are caused by the increasing complexity resulting from the growing convergence of technologies, which often defy a clear classification and therefore warrant either new legislative proposals or new interpretations to rights or concepts laid down in existing laws. This can be shown using the examples of nutraceutics, a portmanteau word of nutrition and pharmaceuticals describing so-called “functional foods” which fall both inside and outside the different regulatory fields of food and medicines (Zeisel 1999).

It is for both endeavours, the adoption of new laws or reinterpretation of old concepts, that legal discourse analysis and legal semiotics – as inclusive and interdisciplinary methods – are called to make important contributions. For instance, the creative combination of various new technologies with other scientific fields, such as technology and neuroscience converging in neurotechnologies, which are broadly subsumed under the oxymoron of artificial intelligence already allow for unprecedented means using subliminal techniques to explore, understand and also manipulate the human brain and human actions (Neuwirth 2023). The same technologies were also found to require a reinterpretation of a number of fundamental rights, such as notably the one of freedom of thought (Bublitz 2014).

Legal discourse analysis was said to have been of relatively recent origin (Bhatia et al. 2008: 3). Yet, it is resuming greater significance with every day especially in the present context of digital technologies that continue to rapidly and radically transform not only the means of communication but also all areas of life. Their impact was described by the 2021 UNESCO Recommendation on the Ethics of AI as follows:

Recognizing the profound and dynamic positive and negative impacts of artificial intelligence (AI) on societies, environment, ecosystems and human lives, including the human mind, in part because of the new ways in which its use influences human thinking, interaction and decision-making and affects education, human, social and natural sciences, culture, and communication and information [...].⁴

Particularly the discriminatory effects caused by algorithms and risks and dangers related to AI will pose more serious challenges in the entire area of law, including notably the legislative and adjudicative processes. Therefore, AI combined with other technologies widely supports the need for legal semiotics and discourse analysis, or more generally a broader and more interdisciplinary approach, to create the adequate foundations on which future and future-proof laws can be adopted. Semiotics and AI, for instance, were found to concur in their broad interest in the

⁴ UNESCO (2022) Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence. Paris: UNESCO; <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000381137>.

study of “the nature of mentality in all its forms (perception, cognition, emotion, etc.)” (Walsh Matthews and Danesi 2019: 199).

Overall, it is the “global character” or cross-cutting, cross-boundary and cross-cultural nature of the effects that these technologies cause which raise serious ethical concerns and pose severe risks for the rule of law and legal protection of all internationally recognized fundamental rights. In this regard too, useful lessons can be learned from legal discourse analysis especially when there is need to reconcile both the conceptual with the actual and the factual with the legal (Azuelos-Atias and Ye 2017: 2; Morris 1942). Recently, legal discourse analysis has been applied to a number of related important contemporary debates, such as those on digital governance (Li and Kit 2021; Wang et al. 2020), on the #MeToo movement (Marusek and Wagner 2019), or the fourth generation human rights (Song and Ma 2022) to name but a few. Complementing these debates, it is considered important to also analyse the concepts of political correctness and cancel culture, which were also framed as oxymora and therefore principally question the application of a dualistic and binary mode of thinking to questions of equality and discrimination.

3 Paradoxes of equality

To specify the linguistic trend in oxymora and paradoxes in the context of equality, it is useful to note first that even today equality was described as a myth, because “[L]evels of economic development, politics, geography and a range of other factors ensure that rights and freedoms are enjoyed at different levels in different States” (Smith 2020: 409). The actual differences underlying this myth actually give rise to the first paradox of equality, which consists in the statement that the same sources of law that aim to establish and guarantee the equal enjoyment of rights and freedoms are often also the prime source of the violation of those objectives. As a matter of fact, the absence of a coherent global legal order, and the present legal fragmentation governing the entire planet Earth that divides it into a system of numerous distinct legal jurisdictions, separated along legal traditions (Glenn 2007), international treaty regimes (Young 2012), regional legal systems (Garcia 2000), non-state laws (Hertogh 2008), constitutional laws of states including their subsystems (Elkins et al. 2009), and local customary laws (Thirlway 2019: 63), can be construed to be at the heart of all discrimination.

Seen from this angle, the status quo of the international legal system clearly stands in contrast with the requirement enshrined in Article 2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) that “no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self-governing or

under any other limitation of sovereignty”. Inequality has been analysed and found to persist even within constitutional systems alone (Cassola et al. 2016). At both levels, existing inequalities are well exemplified by the legal way in which humans enter the world, namely through citizenship, which has been appropriately termed a “birth-right lottery” (Shachar 2009: 3).

More generally, and in a way that applies to many more of the factors that cause inequality or problems of global governance, this first paradox of equality is equally reflected in the following paradox formulated by David Held:

The paradox of our times can be stated simply: the collective issues we must grapple with are increasingly global and, yet, the means for addressing these are national and local, weak and incomplete (Held 2010: 143).

Applied to equality, these two paradoxes combined would mean, first, that justice does not presume equality (Kane 1996: 375). Second, it would imply that equality amounts to a legal fiction, one that legislators know to be false (Fuller 1930: 363), or else to wishful thinking, an idea or progressive principle for a future law (*lex ferenda*) to be fully realized in a distant day or a future new world (economic) order (UNGA 1984).

However, these paradoxes are not the only ones related to equality. Another formulation of the paradox of equality that is highly relevant today is that the more strongly equality is pursued, the less it is achieved and realized. Similar paradoxical observations have been made about control, in essence stating that the more we try to control a situation, the less we are able to do so (or we are both “in control” and “not in control” at the same time) (Streatfield 2001: 7). Or worse still, in a form of “strange loops” or “tangled hierarchies”, if one tries to achieve one goal, one goes back to square one or even achieves the opposite goal (Hofstadter 1979: 10). This also relates to the “paradox of unintended consequences”, which refers to the frequent discrepancy between the intention behind an action and the actual outcome or result (Swedberg and Agevall 2016: 244).

On a slightly larger scale, both paradoxes found their expression in Gordon W. Allport’s book about prejudice, in which he highlighted a great disparity in humans’ modern “mastery over energy, matter, and inanimate nature” as compared to the “handling of human relationships”, the latter appearing medieval in comparison to the former (Allport 1954: xiii). He further explained that this disparity between natural, or physical, knowledge and social and psychological knowledge then regularly results in the sad outcome that the “surplus in wealth accumulating to the human race through applied natural science is virtually canceled by the costs of armaments and war” (Allport 1954: xiii). Unfortunately, this finding still holds true in the present, and it also applies to current linguistic trends to bring about the desired

change in the world by way of speech control mechanisms known as “political correctness” or “cancel culture”, as well as other concepts that have regularly also been classed as essentially oxymoronic concepts.

4 “Political correctness”, “cancel culture”, related oxymora and the law

Recent controversies surrounding public discourses on the Internet and other digital and social media often invoke the notions of “political correctness” (Lea 2009: 257 and 260) and “cancel culture” (Storey 2022) as part of efforts to address inequalities, rebuke those who engage in discrimination and contribute to the better realization of objectives related to equality. However, those very same concepts have also been met with criticism. For instance, a controversy arose about whether the works of black authors can be translated by white writers (Daniels 2021). At present, similar debates have been prompted by bans preventing Russian and Belarussian athletes from competing in international tournaments (e.g. Wimbledon) (AELTC 2022) or artists from performing in cultural events (Deutsche 2022). For instance, a recent incident involved a white female musician who was prohibited from performing at a climate protest because she had dreadlocks, which was considered a case of “cultural appropriation” (The News Glory 2022). Cultural appropriation, too, has for a long time been invoked in the context of measures or policies supporting equality (Coombe 1993). Cultural appropriation can also be called an oxymoron, not only in the context of “intercultural communication studies” (Cai 2021: 97) but also generally, when considering the principle of the common (cultural) heritage of humanity as laid down in the Preamble of the 1954 Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict.

Even the laws addressing inequalities or discrimination can be construed in this way. At the outset, the principle of equality as a cornerstone of human rights was enshrined in the most relevant international and national documents dealing with human rights. Immediately, several paradoxes related to equality were noted: the first one was that the law was put at the heart of the problem of equality and discrimination, and the related second one that too much legislative activity in a particular field is perhaps capable of defeating its original purpose. Generally, the laws aiming to realize the ideal of the equality of all people are summarized under the term “discrimination law”. At the same time, the question was asked as to why “Anti-discrimination rights are nearly always thought to be justified or explained by equality, although the precise nature of this relationship is rarely considered” (Holmes 2005: 175 and 185). As result, the important underlying problems in this

context, namely the fact that the meaning of the concept of equality is contested and the fact that the initial assumption that the law and the legal system are fair and equal is generally wrong, are usually ignored. The same goes for the term “discrimination law”, which, in theory and practice, generally refers to a wide or expanding area of legal issues, addressing incidents of unequal treatment based on a person’s age, disability, gender, nationality, race, religion, sex, genetic makeup, or other personal characteristics (Sargeant 2004). The fact is that the list of personal characteristics used for potential cases of discrimination has expanded since the UDHR was drafted, and there is now a risk of expanding the characteristics to cover each individual.

This points to the heart of the problem, which is that discrimination laws, or concepts like political correctness and cancel culture, often cause unintended consequences and achieve counterproductive results. This then would support the conception of “discrimination law” as an oxymoron especially when it is rephrased as “equality law as discrimination”. The reason is that equality law is supposed to be the law that prevents, and is not be complicit with, discrimination. Along the same lines of literal thinking, the term “criminal justice” has been called an oxymoron, because it should support justice for victims and not for criminals (Ward 2009: 195). Ironically, discrimination law is also thought of by way of its antonym, that is as “anti-discrimination law” (Ellis and Watson 2012). This is in line with the traditional and dominant mode of dualistic reasoning and binary logic in law and in life in wide areas of this world (Nisbett 2003: 205; Webb 2020: 702). It is also reflected in the use of “equality law” (Muir 2018) instead, or in the combination of “equality and discrimination law” (Gaze and Smith 2017).

However, there are certain limitations in the binary use of apparent antonyms as titles or categories for legal fields (Neuwirth 2015). These are often addressed through “law as ...” ideas in order to devise “a new framework that does not depend on a binary, or a conjunction of two distinct fields imagined as outside of each other” (Fisk and Gordon 2011: 519). Hence, “law as discrimination” could be used as a heading to pinpoint the limitations inherent in a binary construction of equality as opposed to discrimination, a construction which is clarified by the maxim of treating “equal things equally and unequal things differently” (Aristotle 1905: 264). However, this differentiation adds considerable complexity to the process of determining whether in a particular case there is equal treatment or discrimination.

The difficulty of assessing a case of equal protection is well reflected in the general conception of “equality as an essentially contested concept” (O’Fallon 1979: 22). It is no surprise that “discrimination” has also been said to qualify as such (Thornton 1990: 2). This not only confirms the traditionally dialectic tendency of human reasoning, but also provides a further example in favour of the hypothesis of a gradual shift from dialectical reasoning to dialethic reasoning (Priest 1990), or

from binary to polyvalent logic (multivalued logic) (Glenn 2013: 267; Glenn and Smith 2017), as broadly reflected in the move from “essentially contested concepts” to “essentially oxymoronic concepts” (Gallie 1956; Neuwirth 2013). As an intermediate step, this shift is first mirrored in the broad use of dichotomies. Later, the dichotomies become progressively complemented by a wider linguistic trend towards the use of oxymora and paradoxes, from “alternative fact” to “*zoon politikon*”, that were found to have pervaded all discourses including the arts, technology, science, law and life per se (Neuwirth 2018).

As for the meaning of equality and discrimination, this means that both the contested concepts, namely equality and discrimination, illustrate a change in the underlying mode of reasoning and logic because they are more often construed by way of oxymora or paradoxes. To put it differently, the entire discourse is replete with such examples, which are not limited to the equality paradoxes mentioned here. For instance, and provided that equality and discrimination are regarded as a dichotomy, “equal discrimination” has been called a clear oxymoron but one that is by no means a fiction (Yoshino 2000: 441(Fn 470)). Equally, the term “positive discrimination” was categorized as an oxymoron, because it was deemed that “discrimination no matter how positive, remains by its very definition, negative and reprehensible” (Kennedy-Dubourdieu 2008: 87; Thornberry 2016: 111). More comprehensively, the same was explained as follows:

This brings us to our second theme, positive discrimination. Although well-meant, the term is culturally loaded in a way that discourages efforts to help enhance the lives and life chances of members of dis-advantaged minority groups. *The phrase itself is an oxymoron.* Though one standard sense of the word “discrimination” is positive, as in “discriminating taste”, in the context of ethnic relations it is used in a negative sense to describe a bad thing. Positive discrimination is thus a “*good bad thing*”, which is nonsensical and fails to communicate determination and enthusiasm in the effort to increase diversity (Matravers and Tonry 2003: 176).

Other oxymora related to discrimination that have been mentioned in different contexts include “benign discrimination” (Cole 1984: 38), “fair discrimination” (Murray 1994: 3), “reverse discrimination” (Alessio 2016: 86; Scanlon 2008: 74), “unconscious discrimination” (Sullivan et al. 2022: 9), “unintentional discrimination” (West 2019: 83), and “systemic discrimination” (Hinch 1992: 112), to mention but a few.

The categorization of each of these single concepts as an oxymoron may appear random, when regarded superficially, as the categorization as a contradiction depends on the individual meaning of each of the two concepts being juxtaposed. However, from a broader perspective, these cases show a pattern in language, one that reveals the subconscious need to transcend a dualistic or dichotomous mode of thinking. This has also been shown to exist especially in the way we classify countries and people (Khan et al. 2022: 1). In other words, the fact that several aspects or angles

of discrimination, occurring in different contexts from employment and gender to antitrust and trade law, use a similar language may be telling and may point to more profound and connected problems underlying these issues that escape one's attention when regarded in isolation (Markovits 2014: 86). These issues therefore require a different perspective, with a wider angle and looking at the deeper layer of the problems related not only to equality and discrimination but also to human perception and reasoning.

To test this hypothesis briefly, it is interesting to see if the same holds true for equality as an antonym to discrimination. First, although there is no example of "gender discrimination" being found to be an oxymoron, the opposite, namely the qualification of "gender equality" as an oxymoron, has been stated (Jawhary 2014: 2; McBride 1999: 68). This qualification was aptly explained in the following terms:

Therefore, and this is difficult to understand, the concept of legal equality that presumes equality between genders leans paradoxically on the presumption of "difference". From this perspective, gender equality results [sic] a contradiction—an oxymoron, a catachresis (Rodriguez 2016: 198).

A contradiction related to the first paradox of equality was also found to be expressed in the term "marriage equality", which was also termed an oxymoron, particularly for as long as there are, around the world, jurisdictions that allow same-sex marriages and others that refuse to recognize them (Kuykendall 2012: 92). Like "marital equality", the qualification as an oxymoron has also been applied to different-sex marriages, for instance with regard to gender differences in the pursuit of each partner's career (Fassihi 1998: 7).

It is not only gender, but also a person's age that is subject not only to discrimination but also to the very same linguistic trend. To put it differently, the present time is not only the "age of paradox" but is also replete with "paradoxes of age". One such paradox of age is found in that of "well-being", according to which older people are able to maintain subjective well-being despite "age-related changes or declines in circumstances, health or income" (Swift et al. 2014: 920). Other age paradoxes have been detected in questions about early childhood education and, more concretely, in the question of whether a "specialised developmental approach to discrete age groups or a generic attitude concerning childhoods with no age distinction at all" is preferable (Elwick and White 2022: 1). Other paradoxes of age have been expressed as oxymora, such as the notions of a "carefree youth" (Triplett 2015: 67) or of a "good old age" (Riley et al. 1994: 208). In contrast to youth, the idea that "development occurs even in old age" has also been considered to be an oxymoron (Brummel-Smith and Mosqueda 2002: 14).

At a wider temporal range, age equality is addressed as "intergenerational equality", which seems even more of an oxymoron, which is perhaps why – as for the

term “gender equality” (Payne and Doyal 2010) – the term “equity” was preferred to “equality” (Brown Weiss 1989). The main difference is that – while equality seems a more straightforward concept – equity also allows for the different treatment of gender, based on the principle of treating equal things equally and unequal things unequally (Mencarini 2014: 2,437). Finally, even the “appearance of age” has been qualified as an oxymoron, as age cannot be seen (Lisle 2010: 122). This statement appears related to the relativity of time in general, and to the limitations inherent in modern languages to discuss and describe the phenomenon of time in a comprehensive way (Rovelli 2018: 111; t’Hooft 2018: 3).

As regards another aspect of social equality, the expression “class equality” has been qualified as an oxymoron, because “the very concept of class implies some kind of inequality” (Wright 2011: 403). Ironically, but not surprisingly, the related concept of “social justice” was also qualified as such, in a book discussing the law’s task and the tragic circle of law, justice and human suffering (Wolcher 2008: xv). The same can be applied to the term “racial equality”, as the concept of race also leans on the presumption of difference. The fact is that this term has been described as oxymoron, albeit for very different reasons and even from opposite perspectives (Fields and Fields 2012: 159; Hicks 2010: 45; Kantrowitz 2000: 2). This discrepancy, however, only underscores the fact that debates are polarized and that so-called “black and white thinking”, literally and cognitively, imposes a burden not only on a binary brain in the present world (Dutton 2022). In this case, the deficiency or limitations inherent in dualistic or dichotomized thinking were well explained in the following words:

“Black and White thinking”, our concept of race emerges from *dichotomized thinking*. Race is a social construction. Race does not exist per se in nature, in the sense that skin color or the shape of certain facial features can be said to exist independently of our concepts (Altman 2000: 589).

Against the backdrop of controversies over different conceptualizations of race, this quote first correctly points out that, from an objective or culture-free perspective, clear and unambiguous definitions of race do not exist (Templeton 2016: 360; Wagner et al. 2016: 318 and 325–6). The quote also highlights another deficiency inherent in dichotomies when applied to profound and existential questions, such as whether humans are primarily determined by nurture or nature. More generally still, even the notion of human nature has been called “a vacuous and redundant concept, even an oxymoron” if it is supposed to mean anything beyond the scientific study of human biology and psychology (Heyd 2003: 155).

If by now it is not yet scientifically clear that humans are the product of both nature and nurture, it should at least be clear that dualistic (or dichotomous) thinking alone is limited and incapable of providing deeper and better insights into the true nature of human nature or into other seemingly complex phenomena,

including attempts to achieve greater global justice through the elimination of inequality. In contrast with former dichotomous distinctions in biological traits or hard and soft inheritance, current scientific theories tend to see a consensus emerging in the view that human life does not, in a strictly biological sense, evolve through genes alone, and that other factors, such as culture, language and even thoughts, also play crucial and possibly causal roles (Lumsden and Wilson 2005; Richerson and Boyd 2005; Rutter 2006: 221; Shore 1996). As a result, the true nature of human nature has been better explained by the following paradox, namely that humans are “100 % innate, 100 % acquired” or “100 % biological, 100 % cultural” (Freedman 1979: 141).

Following this characterization, and applying a non-exclusive logical reasoning, a human being is 200 %. In the case of mixed offspring, one would therefore not speak of “half American”, “half Asian” or “half African”, but instead of 100 % American and 100 % Asian, and so on and so forth. This view is supported by a legal perspective, as in the case of double or multiple citizenships: it is more accurate to transcend the limits of dualistic thinking (and of the birthright lottery) as, in principle, each single passport gives 100 % rights and an additional passport does not diminish these rights. For this and other reasons, jurisdictions of exclusive citizenship should be phased out and, generally, rules of citizenship relaxed until a global citizenship is recognized (Dower and Williams 2002; Harpaz 2019). Ultimately, the departure from dualistic thinking is also reflected in the concept of “intersectionality”, that is, a concept which “goes beyond merely merging separate identities but considers the unique identity developed from an individual belonging to multiple categories simultaneously” (Crawley 2021: 369). Hence, intersectionality recognizes that identity is not a zero-sum game but more of an “intersectional experience” that is greater than the sum of its multiple personal characteristics, such as race, gender, age or faith (Crenshaw 1989: 140).

A last example of an equality-related oxymoron that is deemed to give great insights is the one of “prioritizing equality” (Cahill 2019: 55 and 218). Prioritizing equality means giving preference to achieving one right by sacrificing another, such as prioritizing gender equality over age equality. This is a familiar problem in the context of discrimination, where it is known as “multiple discrimination”, or discrimination on the basis of two or more grounds, which is often both conceptually and practically hindered by the relevant regimes. It is also known more broadly as the indivisibility of human rights, which is the “idea that no human right can be fully realized without fully realizing all other human rights” (Nickel 2008: 984). Contrary to this idea, however, the international human rights bill was split into two covenants, probably because of a disagreement over whether or not political and civil rights should be prioritized over economic, social and cultural rights.

The same problem with prioritizing exists in the general context of decision making or the pursuit of policy objectives, where often, when applying a strictly dualistic reasoning, one objective appears to be in competition or direct conflict with the realization of one or more other objectives. Based on paradoxes, however, the irreconcilability is only “apparent” but not necessary permanent and inevitable. For this reason, paradoxes may be useful in achieving greater policy coherence through “policy integration”, that is, “the collaboration of actors from two or more policy domains in order to integrate aims and concerns derived from one policy domain into another” (Tosun and Lang 2017: 553). The need for optimal policy coherence is exemplified in the context of the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which – taken holistically – should really have only one single goal, namely to pursue and realize all seventeen of those goals without compromising even a single one of them. In view of such multifaceted and complex problems, it is no coincidence that human rights have been described as a paradox and the term “sustainable development” qualified as an oxymoron (Redcliff 2015; Stern and Straus 2014: 3).

Overall, this last example, too, appears to support the main thesis of this article that the major problem is a cognitive one, namely the traditional habit of thinking in dualistic terms and applying an exclusive binary logic, whereby two opposites can only compete in a zero-sum game and cannot complement or enrich each other (Chen 2017). In other words, in any conflict, small or big, real or hypothetical, latent or violent, a peaceful and sustainable solution is usually impeded by the traditional view that there cannot be a winner without there also being a loser. Put simply, a win-win situation is considered contradictory and therefore impossible by binary logic.

5 A combinatorial play between language, logic and cognition

The preceding examples of equality paradoxes or discriminatory oxymora are taken from different sources and authors. They are thus not directly linked, but their frequent invocation and growing number of occurrences seem to justify a deeper inquiry into their nature and origins. This is well warranted by the statement that, when facing paradoxes and trying to avoid their disabling contradictions, it is necessary “to search for the deeper causes of the legal premises that guide our thinking” (Fletcher 1985: 1292). This wise reminder means that behind the linguistic veil of these essentially oxymoronic concepts lie deeper causes, which are logic, biases or prejudices as well as other cognitive processes. The dominance of dualism and binary logic has already been pointed out. It has also been said that “dualism” is

stubborn and hard to shake off, because “old habits die hard” and “old logic dies even harder”. However, paradoxes and oxymora are likely to perform a role in speeding up the process of ending the dualistic stubbornness (Neuwirth 2018: 138).

With regard to their rise, paradoxes have not only been found to “abound in nature and in the realm of the human condition” but also to “represent instances where current knowledge may be deficient, and thus predictions based on such knowledge may be inconsistent with actual events or findings” (Kapur et al. 2011: 1). Most importantly, they have been said to “offer powerful opportunities to test models and conceptual frameworks, and to enable true ‘paradigm shifts’ in certain areas of scientific inquiry” (Kapur et al. 2011: 1). They have also been said to provide a fundamental opportunity “to develop new knowledge and more often than not, a new kind of knowledge resulting from the resolution of the paradox” (West et al. 2019).

For these reasons, the rising frequency of their use should be taken seriously, and adequate efforts undertaken at different levels to unearth the hidden powers of language in constructing reality. This must begin with language use and, in this respect, include various concepts used today like “political correctness” or “cancel culture”. Linguistically, political correctness was said to have “started as a basically idealistic, decent-minded, but slightly Puritanical intervention to sanitize the language by suppressing some of its uglier prejudicial features, thereby undoing some past injustices or ‘leveling the playing fields’ with the hope of improving social relations” (Hughes 2010: 3). Similarly, the meaning of the term “cancel culture” was explained to have been “intended to punish or shame bad actors” often by “a boycott or silencing of a public figure who shares a questionable or unpopular opinion, or someone who behaves in ways society deems inappropriate or offensive” (Allen 2021: 364 and 367). It has now also been found to have significant implications for defining discourses in digital and social media activism (Clark 2020: 88).

While it is important to use language carefully because of the power inherent in words, these terms have also drawn criticism and have been found to be harmful, not only in terms of limiting freedom of speech. Thus, their effect may prove to be counterproductive when the deeper layers of meaning derived from the senses and other cognitive processes are ignored. This has rightly not only raised the question of whether the related laws are still fit for purpose but has also led to the finding that “cancel culture is paradoxical” and “both a form of and threat to free speech”, or constitutes at the same time free speech and the risk of undermining it (Coghlan 2020: 1 and 9). A similar finding was made by a journalist in 1993 when he commented as follows on so-called “speech codes” in an article entitled “Politically correct speech: An oxymoron”:

My coverage of political campaigns and my flights into politics and government have constructed within me the presumption that speech that is political sooner or later will include words that are hateful, meanspirited, insulting, personally demeaning and emotionally debilitating to those at whom they are directed, and uninvited and unwelcome, not only to the political opponents who were the brunt of them, but to many neutral listeners as well who did not wish to hear them (Seigenthaler 1993: 48).

In line with the lessons learned from paradoxes and oxymora, it is true that a new perspective needs to be adopted. One such perspective was outlined as follows:

Instead of discussing specific terms and language or freedom of expression and censorship in general, we should focus on privilege and power in order to determine who exerts power over our social discourse from which position as well as to expose inconsistencies (Thiele 2021: 50).

This marks an important point to consider, namely who exactly exerts the power over the various social and public discourses. Generally, the issue of power and, notably, legal empowerment is of particular relevance in the context of the rule of law and at times when being ignored does not yield the expected results (Ubink 2018: 932; van de Meene and van de Rooij 2008: 9–10). One could, for instance, ask why this kind of control of speech bans certain concepts, while many others remain in use even in legal texts or policy papers. For instance, despite all the continuing talk of political correctness and cancel culture, the use of the notion of “developing countries” or, worse still, the “third world” continues almost unquestioned (Neuwirth 2016: 917). This not only ignores the fact that the notion of a “developing country” is usually invoked in a false dichotomy to the notion of a “developed country”, when the former is a dynamic and the latter a static term, but it also ignores the fact that these terms were found, a considerable time ago, to be “highly value-laden, colonial, and fundamentally racist” (Jordan 1996: 216). Most recently, the same problem was found to be the case with other concepts framed in false dichotomies, such as “rich versus poor nations; resource-rich versus resource-limited settings; First versus Third World; Old versus New World; developed versus developing countries; high-income countries (HICs) versus low/middle-income countries (LMICs); global North versus global South; beneficiaries versus donors; white versus Black Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC)” (Khan et al. 2022: 1). In this context, it was rightly concluded that there is a need “to resist oversimplified dichotomies” and “coming up with alternatives may not be a solution—alternatives may continue to exclude or other” (Khan et al. 2022: 5). However, changing the words alone, as suggested, by replacing them with more nuanced terms, will not suffice and make little difference. Instead, it is argued here, the language change must go hand in hand with a consideration of the deeper layers of language, perception, cognition and logic.

As an additional element, the relevant timeframe also needs to be considered, as was restated in the context of basic income, which was found to create another equality paradox, an analytical paradox in this case, because “whilst Basic Income is

commonly set out as an egalitarian basis for society, it is in fact dependent on prior and more complex conditions of social equality” (Haagh 2019: 253–4). In other instances, too, the wider context needs to be taken into account, which also raises questions about the admissibility of evidence or arguments in terms of their temporal or spatial limits. The reason is that the prevailing conditions and specific contexts are usually what determines whether a concept is understood as a compliment or an insult, perceived as discriminatory or anti-discriminatory, or taken seriously or as a joke.

6 Cognition and the universal language of the future

As a result of increasing complexity and a faster pace of change, oxymora and paradoxes are no longer relevant only to the arts but are also of increasing relevance in discourses in the sciences, in law and in day-to-day life. They describe not only seemingly contradictory phenomena or apparent impossibilities, but also multiple realities, such as virtual reality, artificial intelligence, synthetic biology or androgyny in plants, animals or humans. Their increasingly prominent role in the present and for the future is evident in the trend for experts acting independently in different fields to describe complex problems by giving pervasive definitions to existing concepts or by creating neologisms and ultimately qualifying them as oxymora or paradoxes (Rey 2005; Stevenson 1938: 331). Put simply, this has the result that the lines of distinction drawn upon the foundations of exclusive or binary logic and dualistic or so-called “either/or” thinking are increasingly blurred. However, this change in cognitive reasoning meets with initial problems in the legal realm, which has traditionally strongly relied upon the method of dualistic reasoning. However, this is no longer exclusively the case, and efforts continue to identify a new logic for law as well. A slow change can be detected.

To give one concrete example, the term “gender equality” was initially treated as an essentially contested concept, before it was categorized as an oxymoron (Björnberg and Kollind 2005: 178; Rodriguez 2016: 198). Meanwhile, the linguistic change also led to a change in the law, as several jurisdictions have recently abandoned a binary construction of gender in favour of a third gender. This is only one example highlighting the shortcomings of an exclusive use of binary logic or dualistic thinking, but it is one that highlights the negative consequences of this logic. The fact that duality trades accuracy for simplicity has already been mentioned (Kosko 1993: 21). Worse still, the same “either/or” attitude has also been held responsible for causing violence “by common yet disquieting reductionist habits evident in everyday life that lock people into a binary gender system, but even more so by the tendency of science to create binary analytic

tools like sex/gender or nature/nurture, which reproduce potentially violent disjunctive attitudes at the level of theory” (Groneberg 2016: 225).

As has been shown, the same applies not only to gender or race but also to age, religion, culture, and many more characteristics, which are mere social constructs but are regularly abused for discriminatory purposes in the real world. The same insight about the negative implications of such thinking was formulated by Rabin-dranath Tagore when he wrote, a long time ago:

The civilisation of ancient Greece was nurtured within city walls. In fact, all the modern civilisations have their cradles of brick and mortar. These walls leave their mark deep in the minds of men. They set up a principle of “divide and rule” in our mental outlook, which begets in us a habit of securing all our conquests by fortifying them and separating them from one another. We divide nation and nation, knowledge and knowledge, man and nature (Tagore 1925: 3).

In response to the violent, divisive and harmful consequences of a strictly dualistic conception of reality, a paradoxical or oxymoronic thinking is likely to transcend the culture of contest. This culture of contest is instilled in us from an early age and is “part of human life everywhere that human life is found”, including but not limited to wars, games, in work and in play (Ong 1981: 15). Oxymoronic thinking applies a paradox logic, one that allows for a very different perspective even on trivial phenomena, such as the following questions show:

What day is midnight?
Is noon A.M. or P.M.?
Is dawn day or night? Is dusk?
Which hemisphere is the equator on?
Which longitude are the poles at?
Which country owns the border?
Is zero plus or minus? (Hellerstein 2010: 27).

When applied to the question of the universality of human rights, a paradoxical logic would allow for the insight that it is precisely every individual’s uniqueness that makes everyone equal before the law. The same kind of paradoxical or oxymoronic reasoning thus not only transcends an either/or thinking and mitigates potentially violent conflicts arising from such thinking, but – it is argued – also allows for a broader and more inclusive view of life as well as providing a “fuller sense”, as was aptly put in the following poetic definitions:

Enantiosis poiseth different things;
And words and sense as into balance brings.
Synœceiosis to one subject ties
Two contraries, and fuller sense supplies.
In Oxymoron contradictions meet,
And jarring epithets and subjects greet (Stirling 1824: 15).

The transformative power inherent in language in general, and oxymora and paradoxes in particular, has already been recognized for the promotion of peace (Hameiria et al. 2014). It should also be used for the necessary reform of the present international legal order and the transition from theorizing about to realizing a global legal order (Halpin and Roeben 2009: 6). These efforts are urgently needed as “global inequality” increases and “global justice”, at present, still constitutes an oxymoron, as is explained in the following paragraph:

If what counts as justice is always culturally defined, any effort to discern cross-cultural principles of justice is doomed, rendering the term “global justice” an oxymoron, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights indefensible insofar as it asserts a moral standard of universal applicability (Lumenson 2011: 224; Silbey 1997: 210–211).

There also exists a paradox of justice that shows the strong connection with language as well as with deeper layers of cognition. It was outlined as follows:

As the means to strike a fair equilibrium between self and other, justice confronts the paradox of having to be at once both universal and singular. To be fair to the other, justice must consider him or her in all his or her singularity; but to strike an equilibrium between self and other, justice must avoid speaking in the voice of either one of them and is thus *compelled to embrace a universal language* that transcends the peculiarities of all the selves that come within its sweep (Rosenfeld 1998: 56).

In sum, this means that to fully understand ourselves we first need to discriminate, in its etymological meaning, namely to “to distinguish” ourselves *from* others (Klein 1966: 458). This does not mean discriminating *against* the other and, most importantly, the process of recognizing oneself does not end there. Instead, the process needs to continue in a continuous quest for the universal language required for a solution to the paradox of justice and for a better understanding of the *zoon politikon* or the individual nature in a collective context. Such a universal language, according to Jacques Derrida, means the ability to “address oneself to the other in the language of the other”, which he outlines as “the condition of all possible justice” (Derrida 2002: 245). Even if Derrida thinks that this language “appears impossible”, Ludwig Wittgenstein’s statement that “what is thinkable is also possible” (Wittgenstein 1960: 43) does have to be considered. Hence, if an oxymoron is able to bring two apparently opposite terms together and unite them conceptually, it should also be foreseeable and possible for the law to achieve the same. As a matter of fact, Benjamin N. Cardozo had declared the “reconciliation of the irreconcilable, the merger of antitheses, the synthesis of opposites” to constitute the great problems of law (Cardozo 1928: 4). Therefore, it may be concluded that the universal language of the future that is required for justice may be found in the rhetorical figures of speech known as “essentially oxymoronic concepts”, namely paradoxes and oxymora (Neuwirth 2013).

7 Conclusions

Well, the way of paradoxes is the way of truth (Wilde 1891: 58).

In a rapidly changing environment, driven by new and mostly digital technologies, discourse analysis provides useful insights into language use in relation to its social context. As a field relying strongly on language, law must also carefully follow language developments if it wants to future-proof legislation and preserve the rule of law today and tomorrow. As a part of this challenge, the growing use of the rhetorical devices known as oxymora and paradoxes, or so-called “essentially oxymoronic concepts”, has been observed in all aspects of life and different fields of human endeavour. By bringing together two apparently opposite, and therefore contradictory, concepts, they allow for an important insight, namely that not all contradictions are impossible. Instead, they confirm that “conflict is a category of man’s mind, not in itself an element of reality”, which points to the important role of logic in reasoning (Negoița 1982: 98). As language is a powerful tool in society and also one of the main media through which the law acts (Bix 2003: 1), it is also interesting to consider how this trend affects the law, legal discourses and society as a whole.

In the context of greater awareness about speech, as promoted by political correctness or cancel culture, this article has exemplified the general increase in the use of oxymora and paradoxes in the field called “equality law”, “discrimination law” or “anti-discrimination law” by presenting several equality paradoxes as well as their related oxymora, such as “gender equality”, “positive discrimination” or “prioritizing equality”. Having tried to connect these different oxymoronic concepts, the article has concluded that a cognitive revolution is both necessary and imminent. This cognitive revolution should bring about an awareness of the need to rethink the strict use of binary logic and dualistic thinking, and should expand the understanding that apparent contradictions are not terminal and impossible but point to the need to consider a wider temporal and spatial context. In other words, the essential change in language is required not at the level of the expression of language but at the level of the cognitive processes before a thought is expressed. Metaphorically, this idea is expressed by the Chilean poet Nicanor Parra when he reminds us that a thought is not born in the mouth but in the heart (Parra 1972: 114–5). This can be taken as a metaphor for the “universal language” needed to address the justice paradox by transcending the limitations imposed by dichotomous thinking or the distinction between the self and the other, as well as many more dichotomies.

More concretely, the consequences of discrimination, understood as the negative expression of inequality and injustice, can only be met with concrete solutions when a more paradoxical mode of thinking relying on polyvalent logic is applied.

This mode leads to a more inclusive or holistic perception capable of addressing and transcending the perplexing paradoxes of our time (Held 2010: 143; Rosenau 1995: 13). This is to say that most cases of discrimination or inequality are rooted in the construction of a reality based on dichotomies and the exclusion of a more coherent construction of laws, which translates into the legal realm by way of the present fragmentation of the international legal system. This cognitive fragmentation causes the numerous national jurisdictions to have their own citizenship laws, which then provide the source for discrimination based on nationality. The same kind of “black and white” or “either/or” thinking has been found to constitute the basis for discrimination based on race as well as, *mutatis mutandis*, other characteristics, such as gender or age.

For the question of the control of speech under the terms “political correctness” or “cancel culture”, this means being aware of their paradoxical effects, in the sense that they may pursue noble goals but occasionally achieve the opposite. They thus serve as reminders that we must address the many paradoxes of equality and not just attempt to limit speech – we must also consider and change the wider context in which the speech is uttered. Moreover, these terms require a greater awareness of the limitations inherent in dualistic thinking based on binary logic. Thus, the ultimate paradox of equality and discrimination today is that we can either continue to moderate language under the terms of political correctness or cancel culture while the underlying economic, social and other inequalities and injustices persist, or we can reflect on the paradoxes themselves and use them as sources for a “new kind of knowledge” and as enablers for “true ‘paradigm shifts’” in order to take actions globally to create the underlying legal, political, economic and social conditions for greater global equity. Such use of paradoxes entails the quest for a universal language, one that may use oxymora or paradoxes not only “to strike an equilibrium” but also to find identity between the self and other. In the current understanding, this finding leaves but two options for the future, namely either correcting and controlling the language but keeping the same kind of thinking and conditions in place, or changing the underlying logic and the overall conditions globally and continuing to crack all kinds of “politically incorrect” as well as “serious jokes” (to use another oxymoron) based on gender, age, culture and other characteristics. Which of the two options is preferable?

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