

Identity with a Difference

It would probably be an almost impossible task today to classify all meanings and uses of the notions of identity, especially considering all the controversies and contributions of the many broad debates within the context of post-modernity. Likewise, within the more practical realm of social events, different perceptions of identity, and the uncontrollable interplay of all symbolic signifiers that have come with them, indicate sometimes grave conflicts, especially with regard to an ethnic identity. However, let us be reminded that identity as a concept has its relevance in philosophy. We can, without any hesitation, assert that throughout the whole history of philosophy – not excluding most of the “non-western” reflections which could be, in fact, compared to the Western philosophy – the notion of identity in many different articulations and different discursive contexts has played different roles: sometimes it was more a role of a central concept and sometimes it was just a “technicality”. But the question of identity, which contained in itself the anticipation and difficulties of a vast number of formulations of the concept, has been seriously posed, of course, after the formulation of the Descartes’ idea of subjectivity in its relation to knowledge. Later after the French revolution, Fichte building upon the complex system of Kant’s philosophy, contributed his emphasis on the meaning of identity, which filled the concept with those signifiers that opened the way to a new development of concepts, most notably, the notions of culture and freedom in relation to identity (Fichte, 1977). Hegel’s criticism of Fichte, especially in his early work concerning the difference between Fichte and Schelling, served as a way of appropriating Fichte’s dialectics of Subject in what had been about to become Hegel’s philosophical system. But simultaneously Hegel’s critique in a paradigmatic sense cleared up a look on Fichte’s positioning of the concept of identity in his construction of the Subject as the I (*das Ich*): “The foundation of *Fichte’s system* is the intellectual scrutiny of oneself, pure self-consciousness $I = I$, I am; the absolute is subject-object and the I is the identity of Subject and object” (Hegel, 1970: p. 52). In view of Hegel’s harsh criticism, Fichte actually failed on all accounts. In a very brief summation of Hegel’s criticism of Fichte we can acknowledge that Hegel found that Fichte’s system “was not the system” because identity was only “formal”. On the bases of his observation of the Fichte’s idea of identity as it is posited simultaneously with the difference (since the “formula” $A=A$ introduces the difference in what should be inherently undifferentiated) and it is therefore opened towards the “weak infinity”, Hegel denies