

THE UNIVERSITY OF HULL

THE POLITICS OF CULTURAL DIVERSITY: A SURVEY IN THE LIBERAL-  
COMMUNITARIAN DEBATE

being a thesis submitted for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the University of Hull

by

Seyed Ali Reza Hosseini Beheshti B.A., P.G.D., M.A.

May 1998

Summary of thesis submitted for PhD degree

by Seyed Ali Reza Hosseini Beheshti

o n

The Politics of Cultural Diversity: A Survey in the Liberal-  
Communitarian Debate

This thesis explores the politics of cultural diversity through a survey in the debate between liberal and communitarian thinkers. My aim is to show which side of the debate represents a more adequate position in relation to the politics of the existing cultural diversity in western liberal democracies, compatible with the claims of multiculturalism which have emerged in the past two decades. In order to do so, I have chosen a selection of philosophers from each group: Alasdair MacIntyre, Charles Taylor and Michael Walzer from the communitarians; and John Rawls, Joseph Raz and Will Kymlicka from the liberals.

The critical examinations of their arguments which are presented here concern the normative aspects of the problem and concentrate on three main themes: (i) their concept of the self; (ii) their accounts of the foundations of political morality; and (iii) their suggestions for the

politics of cultural diversity.

Apart from the Introduction and the Conclusion, the thesis consists of two main parts: Part I contains an introduction to the communitarian critique of modernity and liberalism, followed by three chapters on the selected communitarians. In the same way, Part II consists of an introduction to liberal political thought and three chapters on the selected liberal thinkers.

In appreciation of the extent to which cultures may differ from each other in their ideal models of morality, the role which culture plays in constituting one's identity and the extent to which it is affected by communal relationships, and the significance of conceptions of the good life in political morality, communitarians' arguments seem more adequate and fruitful than those of their liberal counterparts, in respect of the politics of cultural communities. The politics of cultural diversity, i.e. the political relations between cultural communities, however, seems to be left with *modus vivendi* models which can be developed into a model of civil association of cultural communities.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the efforts of all those who have helped me during the period of the preparation of this dissertation. First of all, I wish to express my thanks to Dr. Andrew Mason who supervised the early stages of this work. Throughout the rest of this project I have benefited from the supervision of Dr. Matthew Festenstein, to whom I am especially grateful for his helpful comments and criticisms. I would also like to thank Professor Noel O'Sullivan, who has been of great support and the source of fresh ideas. I received practical help and advice, for which I am grateful, from Susan Wiles, Lizzie Harris and Claire Hairsine.

Above all, I would like to thank my wife, without whose patience and support this work could not have been completed and my children, who bore my absence through the time they needed me during the last few years.

Finally, I dedicate this dissertation to the memory of my father, who first taught me the love of learning and also instilled in me the moral imperative to use the fruits of that learning to make the world a better place for having lived in it.

# CONTENTS

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

## CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION: CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND POLITICS	1
1. The Rise of the Problem of Cultural Diversity	2
2. The Politics of Cultural Diversity and the Liberal-Communitarian Debate	16
3. Outline of the Dissertation	31
PART I: THE COMMUNITARIAN APPROACH	
CHAPTER 2: COMMUNITARIANISM AND THE RECOGNITION OF CULTURAL DIFFERENCE	41
1. The Value of Community	43
2. Cultures: Contextual and Particular	46
CHAPTER 3: MACINTYRE: CULTURES AND TRADITIONS	50
1. The Malaise of Modern Moral Philosophy	53
2. The Narrative Self and the Concept of Practice	64
3. The Conception of a Tradition of Moral Enquiry	73
4. Cultures and Traditions	90
5. Conclusion	97
CHAPTER 4: TAYLOR: POLITICS AND THE RECOGNITION OF CULTURES	102
1. The Cultural Context of Morality	103
2. Against Relativism	115
3. Politics and Cultural Diversity	122
4. Conclusion	141
CHAPTER 5: WALZER: MORALITY, PARTICULARITY AND UNIVERSALITY	144
1. The Interpretative Character of Moral Discourse	146
2. Social Criticism	153
3. Universals and Particulars of Morality	157
4. Minimal Politics of Cultural Diversity	162
5. Conclusion	181

PART II: THE LIBERAL APPROACH	
CHAPTER 6: LIBERALISM AND CULTURAL PLURALISM	184
1. Essential Characteristics of Liberalism	185
2. Pluralism, Toleration and Neutrality	189
CHAPTER 7: RAWLS: POLITICAL LIBERALISM AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY	197
1. The Political Conception of the Self	202
2. Pluralism and the Overlapping Consensus	214
3. Perfectionism and Neutrality	223
4. Conclusion	226
CHAPTER 8: RAZ: A THEORY OF LIBERAL PERFECTIONISM	229
1. The Undesirability of Political Neutrality	230
2. A Defence of Perfectionism	237
3. The Value of Autonomy	242
4. Liberalism and Multiculturalism	252
5. Conclusion	259
CHAPTER 9: KYMLICKA: A LIBERAL THEORY OF CULTURAL MEMBERSHIP	262
1. Cultural Membership as a Primary Good	263
2. Freedom of Choice and Revisability	272
3. Internal Restrictions and External Protections	285
4. Conclusion	299
CHAPTER 10: CONCLUSION: TOWARDS THE POLITICS OF CULTURAL DIVERSITY?	304
1. Communitarians and Liberals and the Politics of Cultural Diversity	305
2. Towards the Politics of Cultural Diversity?	321
BIBLIOGRAPHY	336

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION: CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND POLITICAL THEORY

During the last two decades, which mark the end of this millennium, human societies all over the world have witnessed important changes including increasing demands for the recognition of cultural diversity. Although the fact of cultural diversity has received acknowledgement, it has taken place in a variety of forms as there are different views on the nature of such diversity and, consequently, different attitudes towards it: some consider it as a fact, though it is an inescapable characteristic of our societies, is not necessarily desirable. Others also accept it as fact, yet see many advantages which it can produce. Some groups consider it as a ground for demanding equal respect for their identity which they feel they have have been deprived of in the past; while others intend to use it as a means to assert the value of their own culture over others. In the academic world, too, the problem has received much attention and it has been viewed from different angles and within different disciplines or in interdisciplinary studies. In political theory, the various implications of cultural diversity have resulted in strong criticism of liberalism from some quarters. In response, liberal thinkers have tried to accommodate it within their theories.

It is important to see in what ways cultural diversity implies problems which concern political theory. This is the concern of the first section of this chapter. In the second section, I shall discuss the nature and purpose of my study, the themes which will be studied throughout the chapters and my reasons for choosing the selected groups of thinkers, the thoughts of whom are examined here.

### **1. The Rise of the Problem of Cultural Diversity**

Our world should be viewed as inhabited not by a single society but different societies with different cultures. The existence of cultural diversity and different cultural communities are not, however, new phenomena. The problem is probably as old as human social life itself. Various sources of cultural difference can be distinguished: some differences appear as the consequence of immigration, as in the case of the British Caribbeans or Asians; others are concerned with distinct territorially concentrated groups like Canadian Aboriginals; and there are demands for the political recognition of some religious groups which wish to protect their community of faith from what they conceive as the corrupted culture of the main society, like the Amish in the United States. I shall explain some of these



sources of cultural difference a little further. The first is the result of individual or group migration. Reasons for such migrations can vary: some seek somewhere to live a better life, others would escape the despotism and suppression of their native home, while still others may be forced to leave their own lands by an aggressive occupier. In many countries, immigrants from other countries are asked to adopt the way of life of the host country. They are expected to adjust themselves in such a way that the culture of the host country is not undermined. This means that when their traditions come into conflict with the dominant culture, they should either adjust or abandon those traditions so that the culture of the majority remains preserved.

An illustrative example is the attitudes of citizens towards those who were considered as strangers in ancient Greece and Rome. As Fustel De Coulanges' study argues, a citizen's recognition was derived from participation in the religion of the city and "it was from this participation that he derived all his civil and political rights".<sup>1</sup> As a result, religion established an ineffaceable distinction between the citizen and the stranger. Strangers, therefore, were not entitled to any civil rights:

Neither at Rome nor at Athens could a foreigner be a proprietor. He could not marry; or if he married, his marriage was not recognized, and his children were reputed illegitimate. He could not make a contract with a citizen; at any rate, the law did not

---

<sup>1</sup> N. D. F. De Coulanges, *The Ancient City* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), p.193.

recognize such a contract as valid.<sup>2</sup>

Although citizenship was sometimes granted to strangers, “[c]ertainly there was no other public act where the legislator was surrounded with so many difficulties and precautions as that which conferred upon a stranger the title of citizen. The formalities to go through were not near so great in declaring war, or in passing a new law”.<sup>3</sup> To give citizenship to a stranger was then considered as violating the fundamental principles of the national religion. Strangers, therefore, were required to perform the city’s religious ceremonies such as the holy sacrifices, before becoming citizens.

One of the remarkable implications of this example is that ever since then, in many cases, strangers have either not been granted citizenship, or, they have been recognised as citizens only after adopting the political community’s culture (in this case the city’s religion). The rationale behind such assimilatory policies is the essential stability of the political order.

The second half of the present century has witnessed a great number of immigrants of different cultural backgrounds to Europe. For instance, large groups of Turks migrated to Germany, and many people from her former colonies came to Britain. Although the host countries were not aware at that time of the kind and extent of problems to which such migrations would give

---

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p.196.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p.195.

rise, it is not the case that they knew nothing about the differences between the immigrants and the rest of their population. Rather, they did not see any obstacle in the way of assimilation. As Parekh remarks,

When the Afro-Caribbeans, and later Asians, first began to arrive, Britain knew that it was recruiting people of different 'races' and 'colours' whose presence was likely to cause a measure of social tension. Since it desperately needed their labour, it had no choice but to admit them. Thanks to the domination of liberal historicism, it was convinced that such cultural differences as the blacks and browns brought with them would disappear, automatically and inexorably under the impact of a 'superior' secular world view, at least so far as their progeny was concerned.<sup>4</sup>

However, subsequent events revealed the extensive difficulties that such cultural differences may produce. When the Brixton riots of 10-12 April 1981 occurred, few would have viewed them as the result of the existing cultural diversity within British society which, at the time, had led a cultural community, which was discriminated against, to show its anger against the dominant culture and its social and political institutions in the form of riots. A few months later, Lord Scarman was appointed by the Home Secretary to inquire into the disorders. Not surprisingly, the Scarman Report, which was published as the result of this

---

<sup>4</sup> B. Parekh, 'Britain and the Social Logic of Pluralism' in B. Parekh (ed.), *Britain: A Plural Society* (London: CRE, 1990), p.61 .

inquiry, mainly concentrated on the social and economic disadvantages from which the area was suffering at the time and although there were some general references to particular cultural needs of the black community which lived there (e.g. the educational system which had not adjusted itself satisfactorily to such needs), most recommendations were to do with better policing, housing, and employment opportunities.<sup>5</sup>

However, fourteen years later, in December 1995 the area witnessed another riot. According to reports, riots broke out in Brixton after a demonstration over the death of a black man in custody. Police admitted using long batons in a struggle to arrest Wayne Douglas for armed burglary, but a post-mortem showed that he was suffering from heart disease when he died. The black newspaper *The Voice* then printed a story suggesting that Douglas had been brutally beaten. Violence erupted after the disbarred black barrister Rudy Narayan addressed a crowd of initially peaceful protesters: "The Brixton police are killers. They will not understand what they have done until one of them has been killed."<sup>6</sup> Although little sympathy was shown with the participants in the riots, some politicians drew attention to the underlying cause of unrest. Labour MP Diane Abbott, for instance, said: "It is important to remember that the riot arose out of a death in custody. There have been two deaths in south London in police

---

<sup>5</sup> For more details see Lord Scarman, *The Brixton Disorders 10-12 April 1981* (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office 1986).

<sup>6</sup> *The Guardian Weekend*, 30 December 1995, p.29.

custody in recent months and it leads to a lot of bad feeling in the streets. Just to dismiss the demonstration as mere criminality is irresponsible.”<sup>7</sup>

Lord Scarman, whose inquiry into the 1981 Brixton riots called for better relations between police and community, improved housing and new measures against unemployment, was deeply disappointed. He told the media: “I am broken-hearted. This is a complete breakdown of everything I tried to create.”<sup>8</sup>

Problems like this have been viewed by some as connected to racial discrimination. As John Rex argues in his comment on the Scarman Report, for instance, “these events strictly speaking had nothing to do either with social causes or with the commission of crime”.<sup>9</sup> Rather, “[w]hat they did show very strikingly was that a situation existed in which actions which seemed routine and legitimate to the police were seen by the population at large to be threatening and aggressive”.<sup>10</sup>

The problem, however, might be observed from a different view: can it be said that what the black community had been suffering from is rather the existing differences between their culture and that of the dominant majority? A question which arises, therefore, is whether such problems should be viewed as concerned with racial discrimination or related to cultural

---

<sup>7</sup> *The Guardian*, Friday December 15 1995.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> J. Rex, *The Ghetto and the Underclass* (Aldershot: Avebury, 1988), p.118.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p.118.

differences. Jeff Spinner's discussion is an interesting example in this respect. He argues that "[r]ace defines people as members of groups with different traits" and that it is an imposed identity for members of the subordinate races which are defined as having distinct and usually inferior characteristics.<sup>11</sup> Thus, "[t]his definition tries to equate culture with biology."<sup>12</sup> In his view, however, the two are essentially distinct:

Although there is often a connection between race and culture, this relationship is not inevitable; race does not strictly map onto culture. The supposed biological makeup of different races does not lead to different cultural values.<sup>13</sup>

It seems to me, however, that arguments of this sort aim rather to describe and condemn the racist attitudes towards people of different races, than to explain the nature of the differences at hand. Such arguments seek cultural assimilation because they view racism as a barrier to equal opportunity for people of different races. However, many contemporary arguments on multiculturalism, as will be observed in the next section, are concerned with demands for the protection and survival of cultural differences, rather than assimilationist arguments against racial discrimination.

There are evidence in the Brixton riots which reinforce this

---

<sup>11</sup>J. Spinner, *The Boundaries of Citizenship* (Baltimore & London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1994), p.19.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* p.19.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* p.24.

view. The Scarman Report itself had observed some of these differences in this terms, though they had little effect on its recommendations. For instance, the report mentioned the damaging effects of British life to the structure of black families which, before coming to Britain, were mostly held together by women. Since most women have to go to work now, the traditional family ties have been broken and the family has lost its previously culturally formed ties. Scarman pointed out that: "It is no cause for surprise that the impact of British social conditions on the matriarchal extended family structure of the West Indian immigrants has proven to be severe."<sup>14</sup>

Asian Muslim immigrants, too, have had difficulties connected to their cultural identity. The *Satanic Verses* affair in Britain is an interesting example in this respect. When the book was published, it was confronted with widespread criticism from Muslims who believed that the novel was by its very nature blasphemous. Since in accordance with Islamic law the publication of such literature must be banned altogether, they demanded, that the book should be banned. This was, of course, unacceptable to liberals. They argued that since the British Muslim community was a part of the liberal society and freedom of speech and press are at the core of the liberal tradition, the publication of such literature should be tolerated. Thus, while Muslims felt that the law should protect them against blasphemy,

---

<sup>14</sup> Lord Scarman, *The Brixton Disorders*, p.8.

and if it did not, it was unjust to them, the liberals believed that any prohibition against the book would override the very fundamental characteristic of the liberal culture.

The debate over the issue took place in various forms. Some of these arguments were directed to questioning the British law of blasphemy, others towards the meaning and limits of the freedom of speech, and a third urged a more adequate understanding of Britain as a plural society.<sup>15</sup> Arguments of these forms have important implications for politics and moral and political philosophy. For instance, Bhikhu Parekh points out in this respect that to insist that British Muslims and other minorities should accept the way of life amounted to treating them as second-class citizens bearing the burdens but lacking the rights of equal citizenship. Furthermore,

Asking the immigrants to acknowledge the authority of the established system of government and to obey its laws was one thing; to ask them to accept the prevailing form of life and become British in their ways of thought and life was altogether different. To equate the two was to confuse the state with the nation, a form of authority with a culture. Immigrants owed loyalty to the British state, but not to British values, customs and way of life.<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> Cf. B. Parekh (ed.), *Law, Blasphemy and the Multi-Faith Society, Britain: A Plural Society, and Free Speech* (London: Commission for Racial Equality, 1990); J. Horton (ed), *Liberalism, Multiculturalism and Toleration* (London: MacMillan, 1993); J. Horton and H. Crabtree (eds.), *Toleration and Integrity in a Multi-Faith Society* (York: University of York, 1992).

<sup>16</sup> B. Parekh, 'The Rushdie Affair: Research Agenda for Political Philosophy', *Political Studies*, 38 (1990), p. 701.



Tariq Modood echoed the same point when he argued that the new pluralism means that the *status quo* needs to be reviewed in order to give proper institutional expression and political legitimacy to the pluralism:

Yet in order to do this we have to, not despite but *because* of the pluralism, re-think what we have in common and how to give that, too, an institutional and symbolic recognition and to let it have its due integrative weight.<sup>17</sup>

The problem may lead us to more fundamental questions concerning the force of principles like toleration in determining the kind of politics in multicultural societies, since the demand was not concerned with whether the Muslims' way of life should be tolerated by the rest of the society, but whether and how far their demand to restrict the freedom of speech was legitimate. If the British Muslim community is to be considered as a group of citizens with a distinct cultural identity, should their demand be granted? Questions which follow are: on what ground can cultural communities make their demand for equal respect? And when it comes to the politics of multicultural societies, on what ground should political decisions be made so as not to undermine the cultural identity of their different cultural communities? Can and should the state be neutral towards different cultures? If not, to

---

<sup>17</sup> T. Modood, 'Establishment, Multiculturalism and British Citizenship', *The Political Quarterly*, 1994, p.64.

what extent can the state meet the demands for cultural plurality?

Another example in this respect concerns the American attitude towards immigration to the United States. Michael Walzer has shown that sometimes the process of Americanisation has gone far beyond the naturalisation of immigrants in terms of sharing the same sense of citizenship and aimed at cultural assimilation.<sup>18</sup>

The second source of cultural difference concerns territorially concentrated minorities. Again, the origins of a minority vary from one case to another. What they have in common, however, is that they have been settled in certain region(s) of a country for a considerably long time. The French Quebecois movement is an interesting example in this respect. It has resulted in changes in the divisions of power in Canada. As a result, the province of Quebec, which is 80 percent francophone, has extensive jurisdiction over issues that are significant to the survival of the French culture, including education and language. However, such minorities, too, have been subjected to assimilation. The issues concerning the protection of the indigenous people of Canada, the Aboriginal people of Australia, and Indian Americans, are examples of this kind. It should be noticed, however, that while in these democratic societies assimilatory policies were suggested (in most cases by liberals).

---

<sup>18</sup> M. Walzer, 'Pluralism in Political Perspective' in Michael Walzer (ed.), *The Politics of Ethnicity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982). Since some of the implications of this issue are discussed in chapter 5 section 4 it has not been discussed further here.

such proposals often were supposed to work against discrimination, and therefore, viewed as affording the members of such minorities the very fundamental freedom of association, as a right to be guaranteed to individuals in a colour-blind constitution. This was the case when, for instance, in 1969 the Canadian government released a White Paper on Indian Policy which recommended an end to the special constitutional status of Indians. Accordingly, the government proposed that the reservation system, which had protected Indian communities from assimilation, should be dismantled.<sup>19</sup>

Assimilation, therefore, was a way of dealing with those with a different cultural identity. However, there have been occasions when cultural groups have been granted partial autonomy. For instance, when the Ottoman Turks conquered much of the Middle East, North Africa, Greece and Eastern Europe during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, through the 'millet system' they allowed Jewish and Christian minorities not only the freedom to practise their religions, but a more general freedom to govern themselves (though in purely internal matters) with their own legal codes and courts.<sup>20</sup>

There are some cases, however, which do not fit easily within the two categories mentioned above. For instance, when

---

<sup>19</sup> For an interesting discussion on the issue see for example W. Kymlicka, *Liberalism, Community and Culture* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989) in particular chapter 7.

<sup>20</sup> For a critical account of this system see for example W. Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp.156-158.

the culture of an individual or group is identified by religion, it is hard to consider it as a case of either ethnic minority (e.g. the Afro-Caribbeans in Britain) or national minority (e.g. the Canadian Indians). For instance, although the 'Satanic Verses Affair' in Britain mainly concerned British Muslims from an Indian background, the publication of such literature may concern any British Muslim citizen regardless of his or her ethnic background. An illustrative example in this respect is the case of *dhabh* and *shechita* (the traditionally method of animal slaughter followed by Muslims and Jews, respectively) in Britain which also shows the depth and nature of the problem at issue. The process requires that animals to be slaughtered are not pre-stunned by electrocution, as is normal in Britain. Those accustomed to the pre-stunning of animals before slaughter believe that *dhabh* and *shechita* are cruel. The hostility towards Muslims and Jews on this point, as George Chryssides shows, united the extreme right and left political factions within Britain and it was demanded that Muslims and Jews be required to phase out the practice, against their will and religious faith. Nevertheless, the government has decided to ignore such protest and do nothing.<sup>21</sup> A similar example is the case of the three French girls of Muslim faith who in October 1989 insisted on coming to public school with their heads covered. The school authorities ordered the girls to

---

<sup>21</sup> For a more detailed discussion on this matter see for example G. Chryssides, 'Britain's Changing Faiths: Adaptation in a New Environment' in G. Parsons (ed), *The Growth of Religious Diversity* (London: Routledge, 1994), Vol. II, Ch. 2.

uncover their heads and to dress like other students. The girls refused and, consequently, were expelled from the school. Since the case became public and widely debated through the country, the Minister Lionel Jospin asked the opinion of the Conseil d'Etat which in November of the same year declared that French students had the right to express their religious beliefs in the public school.<sup>22</sup>

Thus, the second half of the present century has witnessed a crisis in western liberal democracies because of the increasing demands for respect for cultural differences. As a result, many moral principles which conventionally have been used as the basis for political decision making in this respect, have been seriously questioned over the last decade. These arguments have been inspired partly by the increasing scepticism over the universality of western values. The proponents of multiculturalism have argued that what liberal theory lacks is a proper understanding of the issue at hand. They argue that their request for recognition is based on the fact that cultural identities concern the very central values of their ways of life and are not to be ignored by the dominant (in most cases the liberal western) culture. As Sebastian Poulter rightly points out:

In many respects the most characteristics of the minority communities today are not so much the

---

<sup>22</sup> Cf. A. E. Galeotti. 'Citizenship and Equality'. *Political Theory*, Vol. 21 No.4, November 1993, pp.585-605.

(predominantly) brown or black skins of their members but their adherence to certain customs, traditions, religious beliefs and value systems which are greatly at variance from those of the majority white community.<sup>23</sup>

How far such demands can be met and in what way they can be reasonably justified are the concern of most of the literature on multiculturalism and cultural diversity. Since not all of the issues in multiculturalism are of direct interest here, the concern of this dissertation ought to be outlined more specifically. This is the task to which I shall turn in the next section.

## **2. The Politics of Cultural Diversity and the Liberal-Communitarian Debate**

From the examples given above, it should be more or less clear by now that the problem of cultural diversity has different aspects and can be studied at different levels. I am more concerned here with the theoretical aspects of the problem rather than practical issues (though I shall use examples of practical concern when necessary). In this section, I shall explain some of the theoretical implications of this problem and outline the scope of the present study.

---

<sup>23</sup> S. Poulter, 'Cultural Pluralism and its Limits: A Legal Perspective' in *Britain: A Plural Society*, p.3.

History reveals the fact that human beings have always led very different ways of life. This raises two sorts of question: first, why do ways of life differ? and second, how should we respond to such differences? The former is explanatory in nature whereas the latter is a normative question.<sup>24</sup> I shall explain each in turn a little further, although I am mainly concerned with the latter in this dissertation.

The first question, as already mentioned, is explanatory in the sense that it concerns an adequate explanation for a kind of difference which is characterised as cultural. This, however, is itself a very controversial matter. Such controversy concerns, for instance, the meaning and definition of concepts like culture, community, and multiculturalism. Although I have no intention to offer definitions of my own, the following arguments will shed lights on these complex terms:

What is meant by culture is a matter of dispute. The first and most famous definition of 'culture' is that given by B. Taylor who in the first paragraph of his *Primitive Culture* suggests that:

Culture or Civilization, ..., is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits by man as a member of society.<sup>25</sup>

---

<sup>24</sup> For this classification I have benefited from B. Parekh 'Moral Philosophy and its Anti-pluralist Bias' in *Philosophy and Pluralism*, Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement: 40, 1996.

<sup>25</sup> B. Taylor, *Primitive Culture* (London: John Murray, 1871), p.1.

*The New Encyclopaedia Britannica* defines culture as,

[B]ehaviour peculiar to *Homo sapiens*, together with material objects and as an integral part of this behaviour: specifically, culture consists of language, ideas, beliefs, customs, codes, institutions, tools, techniques, works of art, rituals, ceremonies, and so on.<sup>26</sup>

According to the *Cambridge Encyclopaedia* culture is,

The way of life of a group of people, consisting of learned patterns of behaviour and thought passed on from one generation to the next. The notion includes the group's beliefs, values, language, political organization, and economic activity, as well as its equipment, techniques, and art forms.<sup>27</sup>

As can be seen, while these definitions have a lot in common, they differ from each other in some aspects. The first and third, for instance, emphasise the communal characteristic of culture, and it is the third definition which underlines the hereditary character that a culture possesses. Although they provide a rough idea of what culture is, it is not clear whether the components of the culture are the result of culture, or culture is the product of the components. Partly for this reason, a problem common in all the above definitions is that they are of little help for

---

<sup>26</sup> *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, (15th ed.) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), Vol. 16, p.874.

<sup>27</sup> D. Crystal (ed.), *The Cambridge Encyclopaedia* (2nd ed.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 312-313.



distinguishing cultural from non-cultural. Consider, for instance, the last definition offered above. It characterises almost all human social interactions as cultural which includes, accordingly, political and economic activities. It is difficult to see, therefore, how the political or the economic can be distinguished from what is perceived as cultural. Moreover, they imply different accounts of how culture and community are related. The third definition suggests that the possessors of the same culture are necessarily members of the same community whereas the second suggests that these ideas are analytically distinguishable.

This leads us to another important concept in discussing cultural diversity. We need to know what is meant by community. However, it is no less difficult to define the concept of 'community'. Roger Scruton, for instance, defines community as "[a] term denoting a social group, usually identified in terms of a common habitat (such as town, village, or district), and implying both a body of common interest, a degree of social co-operation and interaction in the pursuit of them and a sense of belonging among the members."<sup>28</sup> As Raymond Plant points out, however, 'community' is one of the most pervasive yet indefinite terms of political discourse: "[o]n the one hand it appears to identify particular forms of social interaction, though what these are has been a matter of dispute; on the other hand its use is usually meant to imply something positive and valuable about the social

---

<sup>28</sup> R. Scruton, *A Dictionary of Political Thought* (London: Macmillan, 1982), p.82.

relations thus defined, though across the political spectrum there is disagreement as to where its value resides.”<sup>29</sup> Plant identifies three models which can be employed to clarify the discussions on this term. First, there are arguments which link community with location. This model has a very strong historical basis. In the German language, for instance, there are two words for community: *Gemeinde*, which refers to the local community, and *Gemeinschaft* which has a rather broader meaning. The first model argues that the empirical qualities that define a community are given by its origins. Therefore, in contrast to society or association, community is a matter of birth, status, habit and disposition as opposed to contract and interest.

The second model which Plant discusses, however, focuses upon community of interests. Accordingly, community of interests is dependent not on the individual private interest, but on the existence of a group, which can be as large as a nation. Community, according to this view, can be created by will, but it has to be a will of a particular sort, namely, for a common good, or a set of interests which a group has in common, such as religious communities. As Leroy Rouner argues, for monks and nuns it means a spiritually disciplined way of living the religious life; for people in India it means caste; and in politics is often used to indicate a hope for a new world order in which there will

---

<sup>29</sup> R. Plant, 'Community' in *The Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Political Thought* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987), p.88.

be a peaceful 'world community'.<sup>30</sup>

The third model is different from both the first and second. It is much more restricted in scope and, therefore, allows for partial communities based on individuals with specific private interests; and views community as a specific device for enhancing and extending these interests. Trade unions and professional and occupational groups, therefore, may in certain circumstances be seen as embodying a sense of community.

If the nation can be viewed as a community with a certain culture, as we usually tend to think, national identity can be viewed as a particular cultural identity. As S. Hall puts it, "[i]n the modern world, the national cultures into which we are born are one of the principal source of cultural identity."<sup>31</sup> It is more accurate, however, to say that, "national identities are not things we are born with, but are formed and transformed within and in relation to *representation*."<sup>32</sup> In other words, a national culture is a discourse and the differences between nations lie in the different ways in which they are imagined.

Most modern nations, however, consist of disparate cultures. Such a cultural diversity is in parts a result of the process of globalisation. According to Hall, there can be three possible consequences of globalisation on cultural identities:

---

<sup>30</sup> L.S. Rouner, 'Introduction' in L. Rouner (ed.), *On Community* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991), p.1.

<sup>31</sup> S. Hall, 'The Question of Cultural Identity' in (eds.) S. Hall, D. Held and T. McGrew, *Modernity and Its Future* (Oxford: The Open University Press, 1992), p.291.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, p. 292.

(i)that national identities are being eroded as a result of the growth of cultural homogenisation; (ii)that particularistic identities such as national identity are being strengthened by the resistance to globalisation; and (iii) that national identities are declining but new identities of hybridity are taking their place.<sup>33</sup>

Hall argues then that,

As a tentative conclusion it would appear then that globalization *does* have the effect of contesting and dislocating the centred and 'closed' identities of a national culture. It does have a pluralizing impact on identities, producing a variety of possibilities and new positions of identification, and making identities more positional, more political, more plural and diverse; less fixed, unified or trans-historical.<sup>34</sup>

As a consequence of such pluralisation of cultural identities, there are arguments which try to show the significance of cultural diversity in today's world and some go on to demand equal respect for different cultures in multicultural societies. This has been identified as multiculturalism.

However, multiculturalism, too, is a controversial term. Amy Gutmann, for instance, suggests that multiculturalism refers to "the state of a society or the world containing many cultures that interact in some significant way with each other" and a culture is "a human community larger than a few families that is

---

<sup>33</sup> *ibid.*, p. 300.

<sup>34</sup> *ibid.*, p. 309.

associated with ongoing ways of seeing, doing, and thinking about things".<sup>35</sup> This definition, as Gutmann herself notices, is non-evaluative. In this respect John Horton underlines some problems which a difficult concept like multiculturalism produces by pointing out that the term is used both descriptively and evaluatively. Thus, while for some it simply refers to the existence of a plurality of ethnic or cultural groups within a society and hence is employed to state the problem of accommodating diverse and sometimes conflicting groups within that society, it is used by others to express an ideal. According to this latter sense, a multicultural society is a valuable end towards which policies should be directed.<sup>36</sup>

However, the difficulty which concern the problem of cultural diversity by no means ends here. For instance, if one is to be recognised by his or her cultural identity, there will be difficulties in distinguishing and individuating different cultures. According to what criteria can cultures be distinguished and individuated? This leads us to another related problem, i.e. whether can people belong to more than one culture and if so what are the implications of this? Consider, for instance, an American black muslim. The recognition of her identity would be involved with the recognition of three cultures, or we should be able to show one of them as more important than the others.

---

<sup>35</sup> A. Gutmann, 'The Challenge of Multiculturalism in Political Ethics', *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, Summer 1993, Vol. 22 No.3. p.171.

<sup>36</sup> J. Horton, 'Introduction' in *Liberalism, Multiculturalism and Toleration*, pp.1-2.

Such questions are concerned, directly or indirectly, with cultural identity, a subject which Hall describes as "too complex, too underdeveloped, and too little understood in contemporary social science to be definitively tested."<sup>37</sup> Hall distinguishes three concepts of identity: the Enlightenment subject; the sociological subject; and the post-modern subject. According to Hall, the Enlightenment subject was based on a conception of the human person as a fully centred, unified individual, endowed with the capacities of reason, consciousness and action, "whose 'centre' consisted of an inner core which first emerged when the subject was born, and unfolded with it, while remaining essentially the same- continuous or 'identical' with itself- throughout the individual's existence."<sup>38</sup>

The sociological concept of the self, however, takes the growing complexity of the modern world into account and emphasises the formation of the self in relation to the 'significant others', who mediated to the subject the values, meanings and symbols. Identity bridges the gap between the 'inside' and the 'outside, the personal and the public. This, as will be seen in the part I, is at the core of the communitarian approach to cultural diversity.

The post-modern subject, in contrast to the Enlightenment subject, is seen as having no fixed, essential or permanent

---

<sup>37</sup> S. Hall, 'The Question of Cultural Identity', p.274.

<sup>38</sup> *ibid.*, p. 275.

identity. In contrast to the sociological account, the very process of identification, through which we project ourselves into our cultural identities, has become more open-ended, variable and problematic. Identity, as Hall puts it, became a 'moveable feast': "formed and transformed continuously in relation to the ways we are represented or addressed in the cultural systems which surround us".<sup>39</sup> As will be observed in the future chapters, however, this view has been criticised by both communitarian and liberal political theorists.

In order to illuminate his argument, Hall employs the interesting example of the controversy caused by the nomination of the black judge Clarence Thomas for the U.S. Supreme Court in 1991. President Bush hoped that Thomas would attract the support of both white voters (since he was conservative) and black voters (since he was black). However, Judge Thomas was accused of sexual harassment by a black woman and the hearings caused a public scandal and polarised the American society: Blacks, whites, men and women were divided on the matter. One of the important implications of this controversy which is more relevant to our argument here was that no single identity could align all the different identities into one overarching master identity on which a politics could be grounded.

The political implications of cultural diversity come closer into sight when the authority within a culture, in particular when

---

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, p. 277.



this matter is contested, is to be identified. Some of the difficulties involved here are related to the ways culture and cultural identity are defined. This, however, is itself a matter of disagreement. As Amelie Rorty puts it, "differentiating one culture from another is- in every sense of the term- contested territory."<sup>40</sup> She argues that cultural description are politically and ideologically laden and "[t]he ever-present questions 'From whose perspective?' and 'In whose interests?'" permeate the politics of historically based cultural characterization."<sup>41</sup> Consequently, even cultures (e.g. the Islamic culture) that define a significant part of their shared inheritance by a canonic text (in this case the Holly Quran) are frequently divided by their differences over the interpretations of those texts.<sup>42</sup> This may lead to further complication as members of a culture may disagree about how to specify its moral norms. Furthermore, they may disagree about second-order principles of accommodation and about what should govern their discussion. When designing a politics which is formed around a conception of good, therefore, such complications make it difficult to decide, for instance, which interpretation should be considered as authoritative. As will be observed, however, the nature of such disagreements has been argued by the communitarians whose positions are studied

---

40A. O. Rorty, 'The Hidden Politics of Cultural Identification', *Political Theory*, Vol. 22, No.1, 1994p. 157.

41 *Ibid*, p. 158.

42 *Ibid*, p. 159.



in the first part of this dissertation and I have tried to show the implications of their discussions in this respect more explicitly in the first section of the Conclusion.

Among different sources of such divergence are the concepts of the self and citizenship. When speaking of cultural identity, we are inevitably involved in a kind of argument which concerns the concept of the self around which cultural identity is formed. Arguments about human nature, of course, are as old as the history of philosophy. What is relatively recent is the rediscovery of the relationship between it and the cultural environment which emphasises that human beings have developed in close interaction with cultures. It is important to notice here that although communitarians have been traditionally more concerned with the importance of social context in the formation of identity, as will be observed later in Part II, recent liberal theories too indicate an important shift towards the acknowledgement of cultural contextualisation. As Yael Tamir points out, the difference concerns rather "the process whereby individuals acquire membership in particular social groups, and the links between these membership and personal identity."<sup>43</sup> Thus while liberals acknowledge the importance of social relations and communal affiliations, they presume that individuals can distance themselves from their social roles and affiliations and perform their freedom in choosing their ways of

---

<sup>43</sup> Y. Tamir, *Liberal Nationalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), p.19.

life whereas the communitarian idea sees social roles and affiliations as inheritent, as a matter of fate rather than choice.<sup>44</sup> I shall return to this point later in this chapter.

Another problem which concerns the politics of cultural diversity is related to the relationship between cultural identity and political identity in terms of citizenship. As observed above, most modern nations consist of disparate cultures. At the same time, the political identity of those who live within a nation is understood in terms of common citizenship. The question which emerges, therefore, is how members of a culturally different society are to live together politically? As David Miller puts it. on the one hand, members of modern states are in the process of adopting an ever more disparate set of personal identities. as evidenced by their ethnic affiliations, their religious allegiances, their views of personal morality, their ideas about what is valuable in life and so forth. On the other hand, "the individuals and groups having these fragmented identities need to live together politically, and this means finding some common basis or reference point from which their claims on the state can be judged."<sup>45</sup> Citizenship is supposed to provide this reference point. The problem is how they can agree about what it means to be a citizen. Thus, "[t]he very state of affairs that makes common citizenship so important to us seems at the same time to expose it

---

<sup>44</sup> *ibid.*, p.20.

<sup>45</sup> D. Miller, 'Citizenship and Pluralism'. *Political Studies*, Vol. 43 , No. 3, p.432.

as a pipe-dream.”<sup>46</sup> In a way, this states what the present survey is in large part about. As will be observed in the future chapters, liberals and communitarians have given different answers to these questions and I shall try to offer a critical assessment of their positions in the remaining of this dissertation.

Concepts like culture, cultural identity, citizenship and community, therefore, can be defined in many different ways and there are different ways of conceptualising and expressing them. As demands for respect for cultural diversity are expressed differently, however, their arguments represent different understandings and, therefore, take different directions in politics.

Since there can be different kinds of political disagreement, it is important to state with which the present survey is concerned. When they are related to cultural or moral pluralism, three types of political disagreement can be distinguished: sometimes they concern moral pluralism within a culture (as the dispute over the meaning, contents and limits of social justice within liberalism), sometimes they are rather more concerned with cultural difference than moral disagreements (as the arguments advanced by French Canadians), and sometimes they concern both (as the dispute over the three Muslim girls in France). I am concerned here with the third kind, i.e. how we are to deal with political disagreements which concern cultural

---

<sup>46</sup> *ibid.* p.433.

diversity which at the same time concern moral differences. It will be asked, therefore, how this sort of disagreements could be given moral grounds on which the politics of cultural diversity should be understood. As a result, arguing about the *Satanic Affairs*, for instance, will concern a combination of moral disagreement and cultural diversity. How such understanding is to be achieved and what political implications it would result in is the concern of the following chapters, the outline of which will be explained in the next section.

### **3. Outline of the Dissertation**

The two questions with which I shall be concerned throughout this dissertation, through the study of the discussion of selected philosophers are, as follows: (i) How do they view such differences? and (ii) How do they think the state should respond to such differences? In the following chapters, I shall provide an investigation through a critical analysis of existing theoretical approaches to this topic. I shall concentrate on the, by now, well-known liberal-communitarian debate since it has provided one of the most interesting literatures on the subject. Communitarians have criticised the liberal conception of the self, for instance, arguing that since it views persons as rational individuals who freely choose their own way of life regardless of their attachment to the communities of which they are members.

it does not capture their actual self-understanding. Moreover, even if there is nothing inconsistent about the liberal conception of the choosing self, liberals are insufficiently sensitive to the significance of community or social context. This latter critique, which questions liberal universalism, contends that in order to arrive at a genuinely neutral, impartial and universal point of view, liberal individualism requires that individuals abstract themselves from all accustomed particularities of social relationship. According to communitarians, instead of devising principles from an objective and universal standpoint, people should stay rooted in their traditions, interpreting the world of meaning they share. In this regard, communitarians argue that liberalism does not sufficiently take into account the negative social and psychological effects related to the atomistic tendencies of modern liberal societies. The communitarian critique of certain liberal concepts (such as the liberal self, liberal universalism and liberal atomism) has led some liberal thinkers to revise their theories for more defensible arguments. As a result, there are now arguments which have tried to accommodate the problem of cultural diversity within a liberal framework, or at any rate, to articulate their presuppositions.<sup>47</sup>

There are three main themes recognisable within each

---

<sup>47</sup> Cf. S. Avineri and A. de-Shalit (eds.), *Communitarianism and Individualism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); D. Bell, *Communitarians and Its Critics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); S. Mulhall and A. Swift, *Liberals & communitarians* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996); D. Rasmussen, (ed.), *Universalism vs. Communitarianism* (Mass.: MIT, 1990).

theory which are of importance to the present survey: (i) the concept of the self, i.e. the way the self is viewed by different theories and how they view the relation between the self and her cultural context; (ii) an account of the foundations of political morality, i.e. how cultural difference affects the foundation of political morality; and (iii) the politics of cultural diversity, i.e. what they have to offer to the politics of multicultural societies. The first and the second correspond to the first question cited above, i.e. how each theorist views cultural differences, and the third concerns the answer which each theory provides to the second question, i.e. how the state should respond to such differences.

I have chosen Alasdair MacIntyre, Charles Taylor and Michael Walzer as representative communitarians; and John Rawls, Joseph Raz and Will Kymlicka as representative liberals. There are, of course, other communitarians (e.g. Michael Sandel) and liberals (e.g. Ronald Dworkin) who have discussed the subject as well, but the selection which is presented here, I believe, forms a spectrum which represent the arguments of the two sides.

The three themes which I shall be concerned with here place each theorist in a particular relation to the spectrum. In the communitarian group, for instance, all the three thinkers view the self as situated within a particular cultural context. Moreover,

they view the task of moral theory as interpretative in nature, in terms of articulating shared moral values within a particular cultural context. However, when it comes to the foundations of political morality, Walzer argues that in order to sustain the liberal values which in his view are shared in liberal societies, we should go for a kind of politics of cultural diversity which supports a partially neutral liberalism from within a liberalism which provides the necessary means for the survival of the liberal culture in liberal societies.

Taylor views the self as possessing a dialogical identity which underlines the significance of his or her relationship with others, and moral theory as the best possible way of articulating shared moral horizons by moral agents as strong evaluators. According to him, conceptions of the good are constitutive to our identity as they concern our relationship with ourselves. When it comes to the politics of cultural diversity, while like Walzer he considers the liberal culture as valuable too, Taylor does not view neutrality as a sufficient criterion in policy making since it abstracts politics from ideals of the good. Rather, he supports a liberalism which allows the state to commit itself to the survival and flourishing of culture.

MacIntyre, on the other hand, takes a different path, despairing of both modern morality and post-Enlightenment moral and political philosophy in their entirety. MacIntyre

believes that modern morality is in a state of disorder and the way in which moral disagreements take place today is the symptom of it. According to him, we live in an emotivist culture within which the self is thought as lacking any necessary social identity because the kind of social identity that it once enjoyed is no longer available. He argues that there is no 'right' as understood by modern thinkers in terms of rights attaching to human beings *qua* human beings. What is lacking in modern moral theory is the conception of man and his *telos*. The correct direction to be taken, therefore, is to articulate a virtue based moral theory. In order to do so, three stages need to be undertaken: the conception of practice, narrative self and tradition. For him, the self is situated within a social context and identified through social roles and relations, and different traditions of moral enquiry are backed by different accounts of rationality. Consequently, such differences require self-governed communities, each of which acts in accordance with its own moral tradition.

In the liberal group too, such commonality and diversity can be observed. For instance, one of the central claims of some trends within the contemporary liberal theory is that citizens are granted equal recognition in the law. Every individual, therefore, is free to pursue his own way of life in his private life and state interference in private matters is forbidden. The liberal



conception of personhood is based on the belief that, as far as politics is concerned, all human beings are essentially equal, regardless of their cultures, ethnicity, language, etc. The self is viewed as an autonomous agent who chooses freely his or her conception of the good life. Although all the three liberals presented here believe in the relations of the self to the cultural context as essential, when the foundation of political morality and the politics of cultural diversity are concerned, they show different attitudes towards the traditional liberal belief in the sharp distinction between public and private life (enforced by arguments of value pluralism) which has led some contemporary liberal theorists to argue for the neutrality of the state. Rawls believes that the state should be procedurally neutral towards different ideals of the good. This leads him to propose his model of overlapping consensus. Kymlicka, however, argues for a kind of indirect perfectionism which allows only for the neutrality of state policies and, therefore, believes that the liberal state should consider cultural good as a primary good to be protected in the liberal society. According to Kymlicka, when cultural communities which live within multicultural societies need protection, the liberal state should respond to their demands as long as the freedom of choice and revisability of the conceptions of the good of their members is respected within such communities.

Raz, on the other hand, argues that neither procedural nor consequentialist neutrality is possible or desirable and goes for a perfectionist model of the liberal state whose task is to provide the necessary conditions which make flourishing of the liberal culture possible. Accordingly, illiberal cultural communities are respected as far as they respect the liberal value of personal autonomy. Moreover, Raz does not rule out the use of assimilatory policies by the liberal state. It should be noticed, however, that what matters here is not the labels each thinker employs but rather the ideas which they share with others since the approach which is adopted in this dissertation can be viewed as a combination of author- and theme-based investigation.

The structure of the dissertation is as follows. The main chapters fall into two parts. The first part of the dissertation begins with chapter 2 which is a brief introduction to the communitarian thought. After that, in chapter 3, MacIntyre's position towards the problem will be explored through an examination of his three major works, *After Virtue*, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* and *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*, together with his theory of *epistemological crisis*. There it will be assessed whether his theory of traditions of moral enquiry and their relations to culture offers a better understanding of cultural difference.<sup>48</sup>

---

<sup>48</sup> A. MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (2nd ed) (London: Duckworth, 1985); A. MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (London: Duckworth, 1988); A. MacIntyre, *Three Versions of Moral Enquiry* (London: Duckworth, 1990).

Chapter 4 is on Taylor, his account of modernity, his view of morality and moral and political theory, together with his interesting discussion about the fundamental issues of multiculturalism and the politics of recognition. The study focuses mainly on his *Philosophical Papers*, *Sources of the Self*, *Ethics of Authenticity* and *The Politics of Recognition*.<sup>49</sup>

Chapter 5 is concerned with Walzer's position towards cultural difference, mostly as presented in his recent book, *Thick and Thin* along with some introductory references to his earlier works such as *Spheres of Justice*, *Interpretation and Social Criticism* and *The Company of Critics*. It will be argued whether his conception of the two kinds of morality can be used for a politics of cultural diversity.<sup>50</sup>

The second part is concerned with the three liberal theorists mentioned above. It begins with Chapter 6, an introduction which contains a brief discussion on the historical background of the liberal attitude towards cultural diversity; its main characteristics as individualist, egalitarian and universalist; and the three main liberal arguments which concern the problem of cultural diversity, i.e., pluralism, toleration and neutrality.

---

<sup>49</sup> C. Taylor, *Philosophical Papers* (2 vols.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); C. Taylor, *Sources of the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); C. Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1991); C. Taylor, 'The Politics of Recognition' in A. Gutmann (ed.), *Multiculturalism and Politics of Recognition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

<sup>50</sup> M. Walzer, *Thick and Thin: Moral Argument at Home and Abroad* (Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994); M. Walzer, *Spheres of Justice: A Defense of Pluralism and Equality* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983); M. Walzer, *Interpretation and Social Criticism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985); M. Walzer, *The Company of Critics: Social Criticism and Political Commitment in the Twentieth Century* (London: Peter Halban, 1988).

In chapter 7, Rawls' argument in this respect will be discussed. An outline of his *Theory of Justice* will be offered and then I shall move to his discussion as presented in his recent book *Political Liberalism*. I shall then examine whether his understanding of cultural identity captures the reality of the claim of multiculturalism and to what extent his theory of overlapping consensus as a political ideal is capable of answering the problem of cultural diversity.<sup>51</sup>

Chapter 8 is concerned with Raz and his argument on this subject as presented in his *Morality of Freedom* and his recent essay 'Multiculturalism: A Liberal Perspective'. We will see there whether his autonomy based political morality can provide a solution to this problem.<sup>52</sup>

Kymlicka, whose argument in this respect will attract our attention in chapter 9, has been concerned with the problem of cultural diversity perhaps more than any other liberal thinker. Over the years, he has made a great effort to construct a theory capable of accommodating cultural diversity within a liberal framework through considering cultural identity as a primary good to individuals. I shall mainly concentrate on his *Liberalism, Community and Culture* and *Multicultural Citizenship*. Whether, by employing the traditional liberal argument of freedom of

---

<sup>51</sup> J. Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971); J. Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

<sup>52</sup> J. Raz, *The Morality of Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986); J. Raz, 'Multiculturalism: A Liberal Perspective', *Dissent*, Winter 1994.

choice, he has succeeded in providing means to deal with cultural difference, is a question which will be pursued there.

Chapter 10 is the concluding chapter. There, my main concern is to summarise the discussions of the previous chapters in order to offer the reader a coherent portrait of the debate in relation to the politics of cultural diversity. In addition, I shall outline some points which seem to me to be most important in pursuing any argument in this subject. for future consideration. It will be suggested there that even if the communitarian argument on the politics of cultural diversity may bring us to agreement on a form of politics which is based on the conception of the good which is shared within each cultural community when its internal relations are concerned, the nature of political relations between different cultural communities cannot be viewed in this way. for the simple reason that such wide commonality is not available in that context. In order to offer an alternative, some have argued for a political model based on the concept of civil association, when the political relations between cultural communities are concerned. It will be discussed, however, that such an approach is by no means unproblematic as it faces the difficulties which emerge whenever any concept of the political (as distinct from moral arguments) is concerned.

PART I

THE COMMUNITARIAN APPROACH

## CHAPTER 2

### COMMUNITARIANISM AND THE RECOGNITION OF CULTURAL DIFFERENCE

In the first part of this dissertation I shall offer a critical study which aims to assess the communitarian approach to cultural difference and its political implications. My intention is to show whether communitarians whose theories are explored here offer an adequate understanding of cultural plurality capable of capturing issues like cultural identity, its relation to politics and legitimate claims of cultural recognition which are at the heart of multiculturalism in our time.

It should be noticed, however, that although communitarians have made some suggestions in respect to politics in general, apart from some exceptions, and until very recently, most of their efforts have been concentrated on the criticism of liberalism rather than constructing a communitarian theory of politics. The communitarian position towards a politics of cultural diversity, therefore, has to be worked out largely through the implications of their discussions on relevant topics. Therefore, another, no less important, concern of this part is to explore what communitarians have to offer in relation to multiculturalism and how the problem of cultural diversity can be

handled from their position.

I have selected certain communitarian thinkers whom I believe represent most of the issues that have been known under this label. These are Alasdair MacIntyre, Charles Taylor and Michael Walzer whose respective positions will be discussed in the three subsequent chapters, in order to explore the three themes which were mentioned in chapter 1, i.e. the concept of the self, the foundations of political morality and the politics of cultural diversity, within each their of theories.

It should be immediately added that while 'communitarianism' has become a fashionable topic in the last two decades or so, little has been said about what exactly communitarianism is. As MacIntyre has pointed out, "the label 'communitarian' has been affixed to too many significantly different views".<sup>1</sup> Interestingly, none of these three thinkers have identified themselves as communitarians and some even have tried to disown this label.<sup>2</sup> In fact, the label has been foisted upon them by others, mostly their critics. Before going to the three main chapters of this part, therefore, it seems to be important to suggest a statement of communitarian positions.<sup>3</sup> I

---

<sup>1</sup> A. MacIntyre, 'The spectre of communitarianism', *Radical Philosophy*, 70 (March/ April 1995), p.34.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. MacIntyre's letter to the periodical *The Responsive Community* (Summer 1991), p.91; Taylor's 'Cross-Purposes': The Liberal-Communitarian Debate' in Nancy Rosenblum (ed.), *Liberalism and the Moral Life* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989); and Walzer's 'The Communitarian Critique of Liberalism', *Political Theory*, Vol. 18, No. 1 Feb 1990.

<sup>3</sup> For a more detailed statement see D. Bell's excellent book *Communitarianism and its Critics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).



shall try to outline very briefly, therefore, the important elements of the communitarian agenda.

## 1. The Value of Community

As the word 'communitarianism' itself implies, it is the value and importance of the community as contrasted to the individual which is the core of the communitarian theory. However, it is only over the past two decades or so that the word has been used to indicate a particular trend in moral and political philosophy which has probably produced the most powerful criticism of modernism in general and liberalism in particular. Thus while, as MacIntyre writes, "from the early 1840s onwards the recently coined adjectives 'communitarian', 'communitive' and 'communist' were all used in much the the same way", 'communitarianism' as currently used in contemporary philosophy is used to label theories which usually go far beyond the mere criticism of liberalism as a political doctrine with economic implications to a deeper criticism of its philosophical and epistemological foundations and sometimes to the very nature of modernity itself.<sup>4</sup>

But what is so important about the community? The communitarian argument is that the liberal conception of the self

---

<sup>4</sup> MacIntyre, 'The spectre of communitarianism', p.34.

which is characteristically overly individualistic does not capture our actual self-understanding since we ordinarily think of ourselves with respect to our social attachments and connections. Moreover, in contrast to the liberal claim of individual choice, people do not necessarily have a 'highest-order interest' against which they rationally choose their ways of life. When this is combined with an awareness of the unchosen nature of most of our social attachments, Bell points out, it "undermines those justifications for a liberal form of social organisation founded on the value of reflective choice".<sup>5</sup> In addition, it is only within some socially located standpoints that the individual recognises such strongly evaluated goods which he may subsequently endorse reflectively.

Another claim made by communitarians concerns the liberal atomist conception of the society. Liberalism does not sufficiently take into account the negative social effects produced through atomistic tendencies of modern liberal societies. Consequently, as Bell puts it, there is a worrying trend in modern societies towards "a callous individualism that ignores community and social obligations".<sup>6</sup>

A third argument undermines liberal universalism. The claim here is that liberalism is not, and cannot claim to be the proper political doctrine for all communities and cultures.

---

<sup>5</sup> Bell, *Communitarianism and its Critics*, p.6.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid*, p.7.

Neither can it claim superiority over other traditions of moral enquiry as *the* rationally justifiable moral doctrine since there is no such thing as far as human rationality is concerned. As will be explained, each tradition of moral enquiry is based on a particular rationality and it is not possible for a doctrine to claim superiority over others by appealing to a universal rationality.

Connected with this, there is another communitarian argument which is more related to the subject of the present investigation, i.e., the communitarian argument of cultural contexts. As Bell points out, communitarians draw attention to an important fact about our identity, i.e. that most of us identify with many communities. Since we feel deep attachments to such communities, the kind of political morality which is favoured by communitarians is one that allows people to experience their life as bound up with the good of the communities which constitute their identity, as opposed to the liberal politics which is concerned primarily with securing the conditions for individuals to lead autonomous lives. The justification for such a communitarian ideal, as Bell suggests, is that it is consistent with, but not derivable from, communitarian ontology, i.e. that we are first and foremost social beings and embodied agents.<sup>7</sup>

While the value of community is at the heart of communitarianism, there is an important point about it which needs to be discussed here. It is misleading to suggest that the

---

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p.93.

communitarian claim is that membership of a cultural community is, as some have suggested, valuable *per se*. It should be distinguished from mere popular patriotism. In other words, from the communitarian perspective, it is not being members of this or that community itself which we find valuable. Rather, the community to which we find ourselves attached is valuable because it provides a context against which we understand the higher goods which we hold as necessary for a meaningful life. It is important to bear this point in mind throughout our quest for a politics of cultural diversity because the demand for the recognition of cultural identity is involved with cultures as the necessary contexts of different moralities. This means that what is at hand here is not the identity of group of people who happened to have ideas different from the dominant liberal culture, but the ideas themselves, which form a common bond between a group of people and are constitutive to their identity.

## **2. Cultures: Contextual and Particular**

It should be clear by now why cultures are important in the communitarian tradition. Cultures are contexts against which moralities are comprehensible. Liberal moral theories, for

instance, are comprehensible within the cultural context of modernity. Consequently, liberal moral and political theories do not enjoy universality in terms of articulating theories which are applicable to all cultures. A liberal moral or political theory is at most applicable to societies with a liberal culture. But this is not the way it is viewed by (most) liberals. As MacIntyre writes, modern liberal individualism requires that we “abstract ourselves from all those particularities of social relationship in terms of which we have been accustomed to understand our responsibilities and interests [so as to] arrive at a genuinely neutral, impartial, and, in this way universal point of view, freed from the partisanship and the partiality and onesidedness that otherwise affect us.”<sup>8</sup> Critics of modernity (and among them the communitarians), however, have shown such a project has failed and bound to fail, at least as far as the limits of human reasoning is concerned. However, as will be discussed, communitarianism does not provoke absolute relativism. Nor does it deny all kinds of universalism, though moral principles which can be universally accepted are conceived as too thin to be used in politics.<sup>9</sup>

The three communitarian theorists presented in the next three chapters have offered explicitly or implicitly and to different extents, ways of handling the problem of cultural

---

<sup>8</sup> A. MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (London: Duckworth, 1988), p.3.

<sup>9</sup> The discussion of culture as context will be explored in more details in chapter 3 section 3, chapter 4 section 1 and chapter 5 section 1.

diversity. Although they all are discussed under the name of 'communitarianism', we are able to distinguish MacIntyre's Augustinian-Thomistic communitarianism, from the liberal communitarianism of Taylor and communitarian liberalism of Walzer. Thus MacIntyre's critique is focused on the origins, development and decline of western moral and political culture through appealing to a kind of Aristotelianism which is represented mainly by St. Aquinas. Accordingly, he argues that liberalism presupposes an incoherent conception of the self which is based on a form of scepticism about the possibility of rationality or objectivity in moral matters as presented within the contemporary emotivist culture. He views liberalism as misrepresenting and underestimating the importance of communal life to personal identity and far less neutral than it claims towards conceptions of the good life.

Walzer, at the other end of this spectrum, unlike MacIntyre and Taylor, is less concerned with presenting a historical account of western culture by appeal to which a certain critique of liberalism can be worked out. Rather, he is interested in the appropriate methodology of political theory which has been described by William Galston as "a distinct approach to political philosophy- concrete rather than abstract, historical rather than timeless, personal rather than disembodied".<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> W. A. Galston, 'Community, Democracy, Philosophy: The Political Philosophy of Michael Walzer', *Political Theory*, Vol. 17, No. 1, 1989.

Taylor's position represents a *via media*. Although he is concerned with the development of western moral and political culture and modernity, he is not inclined to reject liberalism *per se* since he thinks that some of its central claims are valuable if they can be detached from various errors and incoherence which basically derive from the form and scope of moral evaluation which is adopted within this culture.

In spite of the existence of such diversity between these thinkers, they have nevertheless produced interesting and useful suggestions which, as will be shown in the Conclusion, can be of significant help in a better understanding of cultural difference and, therefore, bring about a more defensible political strategy in multicultural societies throughout the world.

## CHAPTER 3

### MACINTYRE: CULTURES AND TRADITIONS

Just as no one would doubt the significance of John Rawls' works and especially his *Theory of Justice* to the revival of the liberal moral and political philosophy in this century, no one can ignore the challenge of Alasdair MacIntyre's works and particularly his *After Virtue* which, alongside the rest of the communitarian critique, has questioned the very foundations of liberalism during the last twenty years or so. As I mentioned in the Introduction, however, while all communitarians share certain principles and agree on certain points, they differ, sometimes to a significant extent, on other points. For instance, while they are very close to each other in their criticism of liberalism and its philosophical foundations of moral and political theory, the options which they offer differ from one another. Since the selection of the thinkers in this dissertation is dependent not solely on the labels they hold but for the most part on the central themes of their thoughts in respect to the problem of cultural diversity, however, whatever such similarities and differences are, they make little difference to the conclusions which I want to draw. Thus while from communitarians I have



chosen MacIntyre who is not merely critical of some discussions which are advanced by liberal thinkers or some facets of modernity but despairs of both modern morality and post-Enlightenment moral philosophy in their entirety, on the one hand; and Michael Walzer who while critical of the epistemology of liberalism values liberal morality, on the other hand; and Charles Taylor whose position is in somewhere in the middle, two common features of their works are important for the purpose of my inquiry: first, each of them provides a criticism as a result of which a better understanding of modern moral and political theory in general and liberalism in particular becomes available. Secondly, the alternatives which they offer can be used as guidelines for a more adequate understanding of the problem of cultural diversity and its political implications.

I believe (and I will attempt to show in this chapter) that among communitarians MacIntyre is more successful in both respects. His account of the malaise of modernity and the failure of the Enlightenment project; his argument for the social embodiment of moral theories and its inseparability from historical context; his account of traditions of moral enquiry and his other discussions are very helpful in respect of the two points mentioned above. I shall mainly concentrate on his three successive books on moral and political philosophy, *After Virtue*, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* and *Three Rival Versions of*

*Moral Enquiry*, though I shall use his other works when necessary.<sup>1</sup> My reason for this selection is obvious: these three books together constitute a single project against the ills of modernity and suggest how those ills might be remedied. As MacIntyre himself has mentioned, all of them were written in a period of his intellectual life during which he started to think more coherently about this project.<sup>2</sup>

With regard to the purpose of this dissertation, my reading of these works falls into four sections: In section 1, his critique of modernity, modern morality and liberalism in particular will be explored. The second section is concerned with his conception of the narrative self and the concept of practice. The focus of section 3 is his account of a tradition, together with illustrating examples. In the fourth section I shall try to explore the relationship of cultures and traditions and the implications of his project for the politics of cultural diversity. Section 5 will draw the conclusion of this chapter. These sections are related to the three main themes of the present study as follows: His conception of the self is discussed in section 1, where his criticism of the modern emotivist self is presented, and in section 2, where he proposes a more adequate account of selfhood as essentially narrative. Likewise, the foundations of political morality endorsed

---

<sup>1</sup> A. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*. (2nd ed) (London: Duckworth, 1985); A. MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (London: Duckworth, 1988); A. MacIntyre, *Three Versions of Moral Enquiry* (London: Duckworth, 1990).

<sup>2</sup> A. MacIntyre, 'An Interview with Alasdair MacIntyre', *COGITO*, Summer 1991, p.68.

by MacIntyre are discussed partly in section 1, where his critique of modern moral philosophy is studied, and in section 3 where he offers his argument of traditions of moral enquiry. This last argument provides the grounds for the politics of cultural diversity which can be suggested from a MacIntyrian view, which will be addressed in section 4.

### 1. The Malaise of Modern Moral Philosophy

The central claim of *After Virtue* is that modern morality is in a state of disorder. Just as we would find the language-in-use of an imaginary world which has been through a catastrophe during which the institution of natural science were completely destroyed in a state of disorder, we may be able to find out (and MacIntyre's aim is to argue) that "in the actual world which we inhabit the language of morality is in the same state of grave disorder" because "[w]hat we possess, ... are the fragments of a conceptual scheme, parts which now lack those contexts from which their significance derived".<sup>3</sup> On the basis of this hypothesis, MacIntyre claims that none of the three major dominant modes of philosophical investigation, i.e. analytical philosophy, phenomenology or existentialism, is capable of even recognising such a disorder, let alone curing it. It is thus necessary to understand what MacIntyre thinks is the nature of

---

<sup>3</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p.2.

such a disorder. According to MacIntyre, the way in which moral disagreement takes place today is the symptom of this disorder. For instance, there is no agreement on what a just war is, whether abortion is morally justified or what a just society is. Three salient characteristics of contemporary moral disagreement can be pointed out as follows: First, that there is a conceptual incommensurability of rival claims. While every claim may be logically valid and the conclusions which are drawn may follow the premises, there is no rational way of weighing one against another. Second, they none the less purport to be impersonal rational arguments. They use a language of morality which presupposes the existence of impersonal criteria and standards which are independent of the preferences or attitudes of speaker and hearer. The third characteristic of contemporary moral debate (which is related to the first two) is that the different conceptually incommensurable premises of rival arguments have a wide variety of historical origins. Thus, the existence of endless debate and unresolvable moral disagreement in modern liberal democracies and the language-in-use of such arguments reveals that while their actual process exemplifies the conflict between personal will and their commitments, the language of such debates invokes the existence of impersonal standards.

But there is at least one important school of modern moral philosophy which acknowledges this paradox and accepts that all

attempts to provide impersonal moral standards have failed so far, i.e. emotivism. According to MacIntyre we live in such an emotivist culture. Emotivists argue that moral judgments are nothing but expressions of personal feeling or attitudes. MacIntyre, however, points to three theoretical inadequacies in emotivism: First, it is trapped in circularity since it tries to explain the nature of the feelings which are given expression by moral utterances, by describing them as feelings of moral approval. Secondly, it is not capable of recognising the distinction between personal and impersonal reasoning. Thirdly, it confuses meanings and uses. For instance, it fails to distinguish an utterance like "seven times seven equals forty-nine" when it is used to indicate a fact, from an occasion in which it is said by an angry schoolmaster, not as an arithmetical fact but as a way of showing his anger towards a schoolboy.

MacIntyre thus concludes that "every moral philosophy offers explicitly or implicitly at least a partial conceptual analysis of the relationship of an agent to his or her reasons, motives, intentions and actions, and in so doing generally presupposes some claim that these concepts are embodied or at least can be in the real social world" and thus "we have not yet fully understood the claims of any moral philosophy until we have spelled out what its social embodiment would be".<sup>4</sup> Accordingly, the key to the social content of emotivism is the fact that emotivism

---

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. p.23.

involves removing any distinction between manipulative and non-manipulative social relations: "The sole reality of distinctively moral discourse is the attempt of one will to align the attitudes, feelings, preference and choices of another with its own".<sup>5</sup> Consequently, the emotivist self is distinct from its social embodiments and lacks any rational history of its own: "The self is now thought of as lacking any necessary social identity, because the kind of social identity that it once enjoyed is no longer available; the self is now thought of as criterionless, because the kind of *telos* in terms of which it once judged and acted is no longer thought to be credible".<sup>6</sup> As will be seen below, such a conception of the self has important implications in politics.

MacIntyre argues that although it is usually held that there is an opposition between individualism and collectivism when political issues are at hand and that the former represents the ideal of the protagonists of individual liberty and the latter that of the planning and regulation, there is a firm (though implicit) agreement among contending parties on the recognition of only two alternative modes of social life which are open to citizens: "Given this deep cultural agreement, it is unsurprising that the politics of modern societies oscillate between a freedom which is nothing but a lack of regulation of individual behavior and forms of collectivist control designed

---

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* p.24.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* p.33.

only to limit the anarchy of self-interest" and therefore, "the society in which we live is one in which bureaucracy and individualism are partners as well as antagonists. And it is in the cultural climate of this bureaucratic individualism that the emotivist self is naturally at home".<sup>7</sup>

MacIntyre then presents a historical investigation in order to show how this conception of the self has emerged and how morality and moral philosophy have become as limited as is conceived today. He argues that it was the failure of the culture of the Enlightenment project in solving its practical and philosophical problems which has resulted in the culture of emotivism. It is the central thesis of *After Virtue* that the failure of this project provided the historical background against which the predicament of our culture becomes intelligible. According to MacIntyre "[i]t is only in the later seventeenth century and the eighteenth century, when this distinguishing of the moral from the theological, the legal and the aesthetic has become a received doctrine that the project of an independent rational justification of morality becomes not merely the concern of individual thinkers, but central to Northern European culture".<sup>8</sup> Morality so conceived aimed to become the name of a particular sphere of rational enquiry in which rules of conduct became independent of the aesthetic, the legal or the theological. It was for achieving

---

<sup>7</sup> *ibid*, p.35.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid*, p.39.

this goal that the moral philosophies of Hume, Kant and Kierkegaard (in spite of their differences) as three major architects of modern moral thought, can be viewed as similar projects within this culture: Hume argued that morality must be understood in terms of, and explained and justified by reference to either the works of reason or the works of passion and affirmed the latter. In the same way, Kant founded morality on reason through excluding the possibility of founding it on passions. And Kierkegaard excluded both reason and passions and founded morality on criterionless fundamental choice:

Thus the vindication of each position was made to rest in crucial part upon the failure of the other two, and the sum total of the effective criticism of each position by the others turned out to be the failure of all. The project of providing a rational vindication of morality had decisively failed; and from henceforward the morality of our predecessor culture- and subsequently of our own- lacked any public, shared rationale or justification.<sup>9</sup>

Therefore, conceiving religion as helpless in providing a shared background and foundation for moral discourse and moral action within the framework of secular rationality; and philosophical enquiry to have failed as the alternative to religion, has resulted in the dominance of the emotivist culture. Moreover, it is a consequence of the failure of the Enlightenment project that

---

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.* pp.49-50



philosophy has lost its central role and has become a marginal narrowly academic subject. However, MacIntyre's main thesis is not merely to show that the study of the history of human thought indicates such a failure, but that such a project had to fail and was always doomed to fail. It is a project in which there is no hope for resolving the disagreement. The failure of the Enlightenment project, as MacIntyre understands it, is not the failure of Hume, Kant, Kierkegaard or others. All of these moral theorists share certain characteristics which are derived from their common historical background and their shared scheme of moral beliefs. All of them agree on the content and character of precepts like marriage or promise-keeping which constitute genuine morality. Moreover, they agree upon what a rational justification of morality has to be:

Thus all these writers share in the project of constructing valid arguments which will move from premises concerning human nature as they understand it to be to conclusions about the authority of moral rules and precepts.<sup>10</sup>

MacIntyre argues that "any project of this form was bound to fail, because of an ineradicable discrepancy between their shared conception of moral rules and precepts on the one hand and what was shared- despite much larger divergence- in their conception

---

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. p.52.

of human nature on the other".<sup>11</sup> Three elements constitute this shared moral scheme: "untutored human nature, man-as-he-could-be-if-he-realized-his-*telos* and the moral precepts which enable him to pass from one state to the other".<sup>12</sup> It is the absence of any notion of a *telos* which has resulted in the unclear relationship between the other two. And even though the philosophers of the Enlightenment attempted to revise their beliefs about human nature, what they had in their hands were incoherent fragments of a once coherent scheme of thought and action because they lacked an adequate understanding of their own peculiar historical and cultural situation.

While the approach which is adopted in this dissertation does not require every aspects of MacIntyre's stance to be explored here in detail, since the notion of *telos* plays a crucial role in his essentially Aristotelian criticism of modernity, it is necessary to understand the place which this notion possesses in morality as conceived in his view. This Aristotelian argument runs as follows: In its simplest version, *telos* indicates the perfection asserted by the nature of things towards which they should move. Accordingly, the *telos* of a knife is sharpness and a good knife is one which cuts well. In this example, sharpness is the special character of the knife. In other words, the concept of knife so understood is a functional concept because the purpose or

---

<sup>11</sup> *ibid* p.52.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid* p.54.

function which a knife is characteristically expected to serve defines the concept of knife. In this view, the concept of knife cannot be defined independent of the concept of a good knife and, therefore, the criterion of something's being a knife and the criterion of something's being a good knife are not independent from each other. At the same time, such a set of criteria is factual. MacIntyre argues then that "any argument which moves from premises which assert that the appropriate criteria are satisfied to a conclusion which asserts that 'That is a good such-and-such', where 'such-and-such' picks out an item specified by a functional concept, will be a valid argument which moves from factual premises to an evaluative conclusion".<sup>13</sup> As can easily be observed, this is entirely opposed to the dominant modern mode of moral enquiry which claims that no 'ought' can be concluded from 'is' premises and all moral arguments fall within the scope of such a principle.

In premodern modes of moral enquiry (particularly within the Aristotelian tradition whether in its classical Greek or medieval version) at least one functional concept, i.e. that of the man understood as having an essential nature and purpose was involved. Now it is clear that the change of the character of moral arguments emerged only after the rejection of the classical tradition in its integrity and, consequently, the principle of "no 'ought' conclusion from 'is'" became so central to moral theory.

---

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p.58.

Hence the non-functional modern concept of man as an individual prior to and apart from all roles. The disastrous consequences of the absence of a conception of the nature of man and his *telos*, however, goes further than this: not only have moral concepts and arguments radically changed their character, which has resulted in the unstable and interminable arguments of the emotivist culture of our time, but also moral judgments have lost their meaning and importance since "once the notion of essential human purposes or functions disappears from morality, it begins to appear implausible to treat moral judgments as functional statements".<sup>14</sup> Thus:

Up to the present in everyday discourse the habit of speaking of moral judgments as true or false persists; but the question of what it is in virtue of which a particular moral judgment is true or false has come to lack any clear answer. That this should be so is perfectly intelligible if the historical hypothesis which I have sketched is true: that moral judgments are linguistic survivals from the practices of classical theism which have lost the context provided by these practices.<sup>15</sup>

An important consequence of the lack of the notion of *telos* is that modern moral theory which has emerged as the product of the failure of the Enlightenment project has sought to devise either some new teleology (as in utilitarianism) or some new

---

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*, p.59.

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*, p.60.

categorical status for moral rules (as in Kantianism). This search for universally valid moral rules, MacIntyre rightly argues, has failed and fails. An important reason for its failure is that unlike claims about goods necessary for rational agency, claims to the possession of rights presuppose the existence of a socially established set of rules which come into existence at particular periods and under particular social circumstances. Thus, in his criticism of Gewirth, for instance, MacIntyre argues that, "the objection that Gewirth has to meet is precisely that those forms of human behaviour which presuppose notions of some ground to entitlement, such as the notion of a right, always have a highly specific and socially local character, and that the existence of particular types of social institution or practice is a necessary condition for the notion of a claim to the possession of a right being an intelligible type of human performance".<sup>16</sup>

Therefore, the gap between the meaning of moral expressions and the ways in which they are put to use has resulted in the paradoxical character of contemporary moral experience: each of us is taught to see himself or herself as an autonomous moral agent whereas each of us also becomes engaged by modes of aesthetic or bureaucratic practice which involve us in manipulative relationships with others. "Seeking to protect the autonomy that we have learned to prize", writes MacIntyre, "we aspire ourselves *not* to be manipulated by others:

---

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* p.67.

seeking to incarnate our own principles and stand-point in the world of practice, we find no way open to us to do so except by directing towards others those very manipulative modes of relationship which each of us aspires to resist in our own case".<sup>17</sup>

It is from such failure of all moral philosophies of the modern period that MacIntyre concludes that there are no rights as understood by modern thinkers in terms of rights attaching to human beings *qua* human beings. Thus, natural or human rights are fictitious, in his view.

The unsuccessful transition of the language of moral discourse can also be explained from an epistemological point of view: the notion of 'fact' with respect to human being has been transformed from an Aristotelian to a mechanist view. Whereas, in accordance with the former, human action was teleologically explained, and therefore characterised with reference to the hierarchy of goods which provided the ends of such an action, the latter must be characterised without reference to such goods. As a result, whereas from the former view facts about human action include what is valuable to human beings, from the latter view there are no facts about what is valuable.

## **2. The Narrative Self and the Concept of Practice**

In the previous section I explained MacIntyre's criticism of

---

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*, p.68.

modern morality and moral philosophy. Unlike most of the criticism of liberal democracies, what we confront in his works is not the rejection of one liberal theory against another or the criticism of some particular aspects of it, but modern morality and post-Enlightenment moral theory in their entirety; and in this respect, MacIntyre stands in a quite different position from other thinkers whose works are studied in this dissertation. An immediate question which comes to mind is, if modern morality and political theory are to be rejected entirely, does MacIntyre himself offer any theoretically and practically coherent alternative? It is still early to answer this question but an exploration of his suggestions in this respect provides a partially sufficient answer for the moment. Indeed it is this exploration with which I shall be mostly concerned in the remainder of this chapter. Three key discussions are of significant importance in this respect: the conception of practice; the conception of the narrative self; and the conception of tradition. The first two will be explained in this section and the third, which is more directly related to the concern of this dissertation, will be discussed at greater length in the next section.

Before we study the conception of practice, however, it would be useful to recall an important point from the previous section, that is, that the alternative which MacIntyre argues for is essentially Aristotelian which includes a conception which is

absent from modern morality: the conception of man and his *telos*. The concept of practice is linked to this teleological nature of MacIntyre's theory via an important characteristic of Aristotelianism. Aristotelianism is a mode (or as will be described later, more precisely, a tradition) of moral enquiry which is chiefly concerned with 'virtues'. And it is the notion of virtue which links this discussion to the conception of the narrative self since "[e]very particular view of the virtues is linked to some particular notion of the narrative structure or structures of human life".<sup>18</sup>

The conception of virtues is very central to MacIntyre's virtue-based moral theory and the concepts of practice, narrative self and tradition are the three stages of its logical development. His investigation consists of deep and detailed studies in the history of morality and in particular the classical Greek and medieval, which are not my immediate concern. What is important is that MacIntyre's goal is to provide a unitary concept of virtue. The first stage of the logical development of the concept of virtue, as mentioned above, is to define the concept of a practice:

By a 'practice' I am going to mean any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of

---

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p.174.



excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended.<sup>19</sup>

Accordingly, throwing a football with skill is not an example of a practice whereas the game of football is. A good way of distinguishing practices from other activities is that first of all, they involve standards of excellence. Secondly, they involve obedience to rules, e.g. if one wants to play football, one has to accept the authority of the standards of excellence. They also involve the achievement of goods. And finally, practices have their own histories. One possible objection which comes to mind is that practices so defined are intolerant towards any change or criticism. In order to answer such an objection MacIntyre points out an important fact: "the standards are not themselves immune from criticism, but nonetheless we cannot be initiated into a practice without accepting the authority of the best standards realized so far".<sup>20</sup>

Another part of the above definition concerns two kinds of goods: internal and external goods. External goods have two characteristics: first, when they are achieved, they always becomes someone's property and possession. Second, they are such that the more someone possesses them, the less there is for

---

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* p.187.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.* p.190.

other people. Consequently, they can be described as characteristically objects of competition. In case of internal goods, however, though they are indeed the outcome of competition to excel, their achievement is characteristically a good for the whole community of participants. These two kinds of goods can be illustrated in the following example: One may play chess to win. If he wins (through learning highly particular kind of analytical skill), he has achieved the good which is external to chess-playing. But if he learns the skills, improves his strategic imagination and competitive intensity, he will play not only to win on a particular occasion, but to try to excel in whatever way the game of chess demands. The reason behind the latter is to achieve the good which is internal to chess-playing.

In the light of this understanding of the conception of a practice, a virtue can be defined so far as follows:

*A virtue is an acquired human quality the possession and exercise of which tends to enable us to achieve those goods which are internal to practices and the lack of which effectively prevents us from achieving any such goods.<sup>21</sup>*

In other words, since every practice requires a certain kind of relationship between the participants, virtues are those goods to which the participants defines such a relationship. But to enter into a practice is not just to enter into a relationship with its

---

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p.191.

contemporary participants, but also with those who participated in the past.

Another important point about practices is that they should be distinguished from institutions. Institutions (in our example football clubs) are characteristically and necessarily concerned with external goods, whereas practices are concerned with internal goods. The function of virtues in this respect, therefore, is to prevent practices from falling for the corrupting power of institutions.

Now that we have explored what a practice is and how the concept of a practice is related to the concept of virtues, it is time to explore what MacIntyre means by the conception of the narrative self. Just as his other discussions are based on a criticism of liberal societies, MacIntyre begins his argument about the conception of the narrative self by some remarks on the conception of life as conceived within the liberal culture of modernity. He argues that there are two different kinds of obstacle in the way of any attempt to conceive each human life as whole (as a unity) in the contemporary dominant culture in the West: the social obstacles and the philosophical. The former refers to those obstacles which derive from the form of modern life: a life which has been segmented into a variety of spheres, each with its own norms and modes of behaviour. As a result, from a modern perspective, we talk about the separated spheres

of work vs. leisure, private vs. public, and so on. There are also philosophical obstacles which derive from two distinct tendencies: one rooted in analytical philosophy and another in both sociological theory and in existentialism. The former views human action atomistically and, therefore, attempts to analyse complex actions and transactions in terms of simple components. The latter conceives human life as a series of unconnected episodes on the ground of sharp distinction between the individual and his or her social roles.

Against such conceptions of human life and selfhood, MacIntyre argues for an originally pre-modern "concept of a self whose unity resides in the unity of a narrative which links birth to life to death as narrative beginning to middle to end".<sup>22</sup> His argument runs as follows: We identify a particular action by referring to two contexts: we place the agent's intentions casual and temporal order in accordance with their roles in the agent's history; and we also place them in accordance with their role in the history of the setting or getting to which they belong. And "in determining what casual efficacy the agent's intentions had in one or more directions, and how his short-term intentions succeeded or failed to be constitutive of long-term intentions, we ourselves write a further part of these histories. Narrative history of a certain kind turns out to be the basic and essential genre for the

---

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* p.205.

characterization of human actions".<sup>23</sup> Therefore:

It is because we all live out narratives in our lives and because we understand our own lives in terms of the narratives that we live out that the form of narrative is appropriate for understanding the actions of others. Stories are lived before they are told- except in the case of fiction.<sup>24</sup>

Thus in his actions and practice "man is essentially a story-telling animal".<sup>25</sup> It is only after answering the question "Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?" that he can answer the question "What am I to do?", (a question which is the subject matter of morality and moral philosophy) and in doing so, he is accountable for the actions which compose his life. Moreover, he can always ask others for an account and put them to the question, since just as he is a part of their story, they are a part of his, and this itself plays an important role in constituting narratives.

Accordingly, "[t]he unity of human life is the unity of a narrative quest"<sup>26</sup> which is "looking for a conception of *the* good which will enable us to order other goods. for a conception of *the* good which will enable us to extend our understanding of the purpose and content of the virtues. for a conception of *the* good which will enable us to understand the place of integrity and

---

<sup>23</sup> *ibid.*, p.208.

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*, p.212.

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*, p.216.

<sup>26</sup> *ibid.*, p.219.

constancy in life".<sup>27</sup>

We saw above what a definition of virtues initially consists of: the possession and exercise of those human qualities which enable us to achieve goods internal to practices. However, in the light of the conception of narrative life, it should be added that those human qualities also sustain us in the relevant kind of quest of the good by enabling us to overcome obstacles (harms, dangers, temptations and distractions) in the way of such a quest and provide us increasing self-knowledge and knowledge of the good. Consequently, "[t]he catalogue of the virtues will therefore include the virtues required to sustain the kind of households and the kind of political communities in which men and women can seek for the good together and the virtues necessary for philosophical enquiry about the character of the good".<sup>28</sup>

Does this mean that we are locked in the historical and social identity we possess? MacIntyre's reply is negative: rebellion against one's identity is always one way of expressing it, and "the fact that the self has to find its moral identity in and through its membership in communities such as those of family, the neighborhood, the city and the tribe does not entail that the self has to accept the moral *limitations* of the particularity of those forms of community".<sup>29</sup>

In sum, an agent's identity is in key part what he or she

---

<sup>27</sup> *ibid.* c.219.

<sup>28</sup> *ibid.* p.219.

<sup>29</sup> *ibid.* p.221.

inherits and a specific past that is present in his or her present; hence, the relationship of a practice to the narrativity of the self in terms of the narrativity of a practice. However, it is true that the traditions through which particular practices are transmitted do not exist in isolation from larger social traditions. It is the comprehension of such social traditions to which we turn in the next section.

### **3. The Conception of a Tradition of Moral Enquiry**

Although it is initially in his *After Virtue* that MacIntyre has argued for the conception of a tradition, it is in his *Whose Justice? Which Rationally?* that this conception is discussed at greater length. However, our study of this concept will begin from the former book and then will be extended into its fuller version in the latter.

It is important not to confuse from the outset the conception of tradition as argued by MacIntyre with the notion of tradition as understood by conservative political theorists. At least as understood by Burke, the latter characteristically contrasts with reason and is used to prevent any conflict and sustain stability. Against such a view (and this itself makes clear the sense in which he uses the term) MacIntyre argues that all reasoning takes place within the context of some traditional

mode of thought and when a tradition is in a good order it is always constituted by a conception of the good:

A living tradition then is an historically extended, socially embodied argument, and an argument precisely in part about the goods which constitute the tradition. Within a tradition the pursuit of goods extends through generations, sometimes through many generations.<sup>30</sup>

In *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* MacIntyre's approach to the conception of a tradition aims to answer an important question one confronts at the end of *After Virtue*: "How ought we to decide among the claims of rival and incompatible accounts of justice competing for our moral, social, and political allegiance?"<sup>31</sup> Although to a limited extent, *After Virtue* makes it clear that instead of the view which dominated philosophical discourse at the time, there is not one line of moral enquiry which has derived and changed throughout the history of philosophy, but rival traditions, each consisting of a conception of the good for the pursuit of which that particular tradition is constituted. An immediate question, therefore, concerns the judgment we have to make in order to choose one rather than another. Here, MacIntyre introduces a more comprehensive version of the concept. He argues that traditions of thought differ from each other not only in the conceptions of the good which

---

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p.222.

<sup>31</sup> MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, p.2.



they hold, but in their account of what rationality is. Such a claim about rival accounts of rationality undermines fundamentally a possible answer to the above question according to which judgments among rival traditions should be made by appealing to the laws of logic. Accordingly, one tradition may be found logically superior to others. But as MacIntyre notices, observance of the law of logic is only a necessary and not a sufficient condition for theoretical or practical rationality: "It is on what has to be added to observance of the laws of logic to justify ascriptions of rationality- whether to oneself or to others, whether to modes of enquiry or to justifications of belief, or to courses of action and their justification- that disagreement arises concerning the fundamental nature of rationality and extends into disagreement over how it is rationally appropriate to proceed in the face of these disagreements".<sup>32</sup> The conception of tradition, therefore, is now to be understood in a wider sense.

In order to understand what a tradition of moral enquiry is, it is helpful to study the relationship within traditions. As will be argued, MacIntyre's account of epistemological crisis plays a key part in this respect. Some of his studies in the history of moral thought will follow this discussion in order to illuminate the argument, though as briefly as necessary. Then his argument about the incommensurability and untranslatability of traditions which concerns the relationship between traditions will be

---

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.* p.4.

examined through which this section is related to the final section of this chapter.

It is important to see first the relationships within a tradition of moral enquiry. This can be better understood through understanding what MacIntyre calls 'Epistemological Crisis'. To share a culture is to share schemata which are at one and the same time constitutive and normative for intelligible action by one and are also means for his or her interpretations of other actions. Consider now that someone who has been away from his home for a long time returns and finds that his people have changed in his absence. There will arise problems, in that the narrative of his family and of the society he lives in, through which he had identified his own place in society and his relationship to others, has been disrupted by radical interpretative doubts. He finds himself, therefore, in an epistemological crisis. An epistemological crisis, thus, is always a crisis in human relationships. Similarly, "[w]hen an epistemological crisis is resolved, it is by the construction of a new narrative which enables the agents to understand *both* how he or she could intelligibly have held his or her original beliefs *and* how he or she could have been drastically misled by them".<sup>33</sup> The agent, however, has to accept two points: first, that these new forms of understanding may themselves in turn come

---

<sup>33</sup> A. MacIntyre, 'Epistemological Crisis, Dramatic Narrative and The Philosophy of Science', *The Monist* 69, 4, 1977, p.455.

to be put in question; and secondly, that since in such crisis the criticism of truth, intelligibility and rationality may be put in question, "we are never in the position to claim that now we possess the truth or now we are fully rational".<sup>34</sup>

But how does such a progress towards a better narrative begin? According to MacIntyre, one sign that shows that a tradition is in crisis is that "its accustomed ways for relating *seems* and *is* begins to break down" and, consequently, "the pressures of scepticism becomes more urgent and attempts to do the impossible, to refute scepticism once and for all, becomes projects of central importance to the culture and not mere private academic enterprises".<sup>35</sup> But why has the role of narrative been ignored so widely within philosophical discourse? It is because tradition has usually been taken seriously only by conservative social theorists and such theorists have never attended to the connection between tradition and narrative. What constitutes a tradition is a conflict of interpretations of that tradition and this is in contrast to the conception of tradition as a resolution to rational conflicts for which traditions are used within conservative theories. Thus all kinds of traditions (religious, political and intellectual) involve epistemological debates as a necessary feature of their conflicts. Moreover, "it is not merely that different participants in a tradition disagree: they

---

<sup>34</sup> *ibid.* p. 455.

<sup>35</sup> *ibid.* p. 459.

also disagree as to how to characterize their disagreements and as to how to resolve them. They disagree as to what constitutes appropriate reasoning, decisive evidence, conclusive proof".<sup>36</sup>

It is worth mentioning at this point that the implication of the concept of epistemological crisis within traditions runs against a charge which is usually held against communitarians in general and MacIntyre in particular. It is usually held that communitarianism is by its very nature intolerant towards any change and any criticism from within. Maurizio Passerin D'Entreves, for instance, while defending other communitarians against this charge, argues that since MacIntyre's conception of community is based on reviving the strong consensus on the values and norms that should govern our social and political life as it used to be conceived in the ancient and medieval conceptions of morality of Aristotle and Aquinas, his position is radically hostile to the principle of tolerance:

I would argue that this proposal, together with the idea of constructing local forms of community integrated around a shared conception of the good, does not leave much space for tolerance, since it does not acknowledge the legitimacy of conflict and the existence of a genuine pluralism of values in the moral and political spheres of contemporary society.<sup>37</sup>

The point which D'Entreves misses is that MacIntyre may be

---

<sup>36</sup> *ibid.*, p.461.

<sup>37</sup> M.P. D'Entreves, 'Communitarianism and the Question of Toleration', *Journal of Social Philosophy*, Vol. XXI, No. 1, Spring 1990, p.86.

accused of being hostile to the pluralism as viewed by contemporary liberalism but not to tolerance. According to MacIntyre, rationality requires dialogue with different traditions which demands the learning of a second first language. dialogue and engagement. One must concede the possibility that one's tradition could be overwhelmed by epistemological crisis, and a different tradition could have more adequate resources to make sense of the world. Commitment to a tradition, therefore, does not exclude dialogue with other traditions and does not imply intolerance. On the contrary, I believe that this provides a better and more coherent account of the nature of such criticism. Criticism of a tradition, unlike the way it is conceived by modern liberal thinkers, does not begin from nowhere and out of blue. As far as human reasoning is concerned, there is no view from nowhere since it would require a vantage point beyond the historical and cultural contingencies of the human creature. Still, it is very possible to criticise from within, let alone from between, traditions.

Conflict, however, does not arise only within, but also between traditions. But before going on to explain the relation between traditions of moral enquiry and hence the problem of incommensurability and untranslatability, we need to review some of MacIntyre's examples in order to illuminate this discussion. It is crucial to understand how every tradition holds

its own account of rationality. I have chosen Plato's and Aristotle's positions on the one hand and the Enlightenment and liberal positions on the other.

According to Plato, to engage in intellectual enquiry is not to find theses and rational justifications for them which so far have not been undermined or refuted, but to understand the movement from thesis to thesis as a movement towards a kind of *logos* which will eventually disclose how things are as such. This conception of forms in turn provides a resource for correcting and reformulating successive theses:

So the terminus and *telos* of enquiring into what justice is has to be an account of justice as such, of the *eidos* of all partial and one-sided exemplifications and one-sided elucidation. The theory of forms is primarily a theory of inquiry, a theory ignorance of which by those engaged in enquiry will necessarily lead them to fail, because they will not understand adequately what they are doing.<sup>38</sup>

According to MacIntyre, there are four characteristics which an enquiry which is in progress towards a goal possesses which an enquiry otherwise does not: First, the later stages of enquiry would have to presuppose the findings of the earlier. Second, the later stages provide a theory of error and falsity to explain the inadequacies of the earlier stages. Third, at later stages, it should be possible to provide a successively more

---

<sup>38</sup> MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, p.79.

adequate conception of the goal of the enquiry. And fourth, this gradually enriched conception of the goal is a conception of what it would be to have completed the enquiry. Accordingly, therefore, Plato needs to vindicate a kind of rational enquiry with respect to justice which claims (as Sophists argued) that the most which can be said is not what justice is, but what it seems to be to a particular community.

Against this view, Aristotle's revision of Plato contains at least one fundamental difference: While Plato contrasts the realm of forms and the realm of particulars as entirely different, Aristotle views the forms as confirmed only in the particulars. Therefore, whereas Plato contrasts the ideal polity and the realm of actual *poleis*, Aristotle understands the type of *polis* which is the best as conforming to a standard which is embodied within the practices of actual politics.

It is important, however, not to think of the Aristotelian view as relativist since his theory of the virtues (as the basis of policy-making of each polis) presupposes a distinction between what any particular individual at any particular time sees as good for him and what is really good for him as a man. For Aristotle, political excellence and the excellence of the legislator consist in being good at ordering goods both generally and in particular cases. However, the goods at which the *polis* aims are not only political, but all the goods of its citizens and above all *theoria*

which is a certain kind of contemplative understanding. Therefore, there is no incompatibility between the pursuit of civic virtue on the one hand and the pursuit of individual good on the other.

On Aristotle's account of practical rationality, because a person must be initially moved by a belief about what is best for him here and now and because this in turn requires that such a belief must be rationally well-grounded by good reasons, his belief needs to be supported by different kinds of reason:

In Aristotle's view the individual will have to reason from some initial conception of what is good for him, being the type of person that he is, generally circumstanced as he is, to the best supported view which he can discover of what is good as such for human beings as such; and then he will have to reason from that account of what is good and best as such to a conclusion about what is best for him to achieve here and now in his particular situation.<sup>39</sup>

In order to do so, the individual needs to exercise five related abilities: The first is the characterisation of the particular situation in which he is. The second concerns the ability to reason through dialectical modes of reasoning into an adequate concept of the good as such. The third requires his ability of understanding his goods *qua* participants in different activities which are appropriate to someone of his age, his stage of

---

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p.125.



educational development, his occupation, etc. The fourth is that he must be able to reason from his understanding of the good in general to a conclusion about the one which is possible and best for him. Finally, the fifth ability which needs to be trained, is the ability to deploy the four others in conjunction, one which can be learnt in the *polis*.

In contrast to the Aristotelian account of justice and practical rationality according to which particularities play an important role, the central aspiration of the Enlightenment project was to provide standards and methods of rational justification for debate in the public realm by which courses of action in every sphere of life could be judged just or unjust and rational or irrational:

So, it was hoped, reason would displace authority and tradition. Rational justification was to appeal to principles undeniable by any rational person and therefore independent of all those social and cultural particularities which the Enlightenment thinkers took to be the mere accidental clothing of reason in particular times and places.<sup>40</sup>

The liberal tradition which has dominated moral and political philosophy since then has taken a similar task. A discussion which had not been advanced by MacIntyre until the publication of *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* is that instead of discovering an epistemological ground which is neutral in relation to all the discussions of other traditions and hence able to claim a

---

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.* p.6.

kind of superiority over rival modes of moral enquiry, liberalism has itself been transformed into a tradition. The liberal claim (at least in its Kantian form) was initially to provide a political, legal and economic framework in which those who hold different and incompatible conceptions of the good life would be able to appeal to neutral standards so they could live altogether in peace: "Every individual is to be equally free to propose and to live by whatever conception of the good he or she pleases, derived from whatever theory or tradition he or she may adhere to, unless that conception of the good involves reshaping the life of the rest of the community in accordance with it".<sup>41</sup> In the public realm, only the expression of preference is permitted, either as an individual or a group, and it is here that the market-based idea of liberalism can be easily observed: whether a particular preference is chosen as the basis of policy-making is a matter for bargaining. It is on the basis of such an idea that central features of the liberal system of evaluation becomes comprehensible: the principle of neutrality requires that the liberal is committed to there being no one overriding good. What follows from this is that life is compartmentalised into different spheres and, therefore, each individual pursues his or her good within different and distinct groups. The liberal self, then, is one that moves from sphere to sphere, compartmentalising its attitudes. The claims of any one sphere to attention or to resources are once again to be

---

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, p.336.

determined by the summing of individual preferences and by bargaining:

So it is important for all areas of human life and not only for explicitly political and economic transactions that there should be acceptable rules of bargaining. And what each individual and each group has to hope for from these rules is that they should be such as to enable that individual or that group to be as effective as possible in implementing his, her, or their preferences. This kind of effectiveness thus becomes a central value of liberal modernity.<sup>42</sup>

The implementation of preferences and desires, however, is not peculiar to liberalism. What makes it distinguishable is that first-person expressions of desired have been transformed into statements of reason for action, i.e., into premises for practical reasoning. MacIntyre argues that such a transformation "is brought about by a restructuring of thought and action in a way which accords with the procedures of the public realms of the market and of liberal individualist politics".<sup>43</sup>

The difference between the liberal conception of practical reasoning and the Aristotelian is now clear: in Aristotelian practical reasoning it is the individual *qua* citizen who reasons whereas in the practical reasoning of liberal modernist it is the individual *qua* individual. According to MacIntyre, the culture of

---

<sup>42</sup> *ibid.* p.337.

<sup>43</sup> *ibid.* p.339.

liberalism transforms expressions of opinion into what its political and moral theory had already said that they were, i.e., the defence of rival moral and political standpoints is interpreted within the liberal order as the expression of preferences. Whereas liberalism initially rejected the claims of any overriding theory of the good, in fact it embodies just such a theory because “[t]he starting points of liberal theorizing are never neutral as between conceptions of the human good; they are always liberal starting points”.<sup>44</sup>

These examples seem to illustrate sufficiently the conception of tradition of intellectual enquiry. As promised above, we also need to explore MacIntyre's view of the relationship between traditions which I believe is the part of this section most relevant to our discussion.

We have seen above that in MacIntyre's view, there are different and incompatible accounts of rationality, each of which results in a different conception of moral issues like virtues and justice. The question which arises, therefore, is whether we are able to evaluate one tradition of moral enquiry against another and if we can, on what ground we are able to do so?

Here, MacIntyre distinguishes between the kind of evaluation with which we are engaged in the comparison of rival and competing claims within one and the same tradition and that of evaluating similar claims when each has developed within two

---

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, p.345.

very different and competing traditions. In the first type, what is available is a set of relatively unproblematic standards to which we appeal in making such a comparison. But in the latter, there are accounts of practical reasoning which are developed within very different conceptual frameworks. Here we confront the problem of incommensurability and untranslatability which runs against the very central claim of cosmopolitan modernity which believes that all cultural phenomena must be capable of being translated into the language which the adherents of modernity speak to each other. Moreover, broadly speaking, there is no neutral tradition-independent standards of a rationally justifiable kind to which we can appeal in such evaluative comparison. That is not to say that no independent and neutral standard can be found at all. Rather, what MacIntyre points out is that any attempt to identify some ground for justice independent of the competing traditions requires some feature or features of human moral stance which hold(s) of human beings independently of and apart from those characteristics which belong to them as members of any particular society or cultural tradition. In doing so, the difficulty which arises is that "those conceptions of universality and impersonality which survive this kind of abstraction from the concreteness of traditional or even nontraditional conventional modes of moral thought and action are far too thin and meagre to supply what is needed".<sup>45</sup>

---

<sup>45</sup> Ibid. p.334.

MacIntyre's position, therefore, is different from an absolute relativist one, since he does not reject the possibility of finding universality altogether. What he believes is that by appealing to such universality, we cannot go far enough in establishing those grounds we are searching for.

His position is also distinct from broad relativism in another way: if two rival moral traditions are able to recognise each other as advancing rival contentions on important issues, they must necessarily share at least some common features. Therefore, while it is possible that there are some incommensurable standards to which each tradition appeals, it is not the only possible kind of relationship: "It will thus sometimes at least be possible for adherents of each tradition to understand and to evaluate- by their own standards- the characterizations of their positions advanced by their rivals".<sup>46</sup>

What such a conception of tradition of moral enquiry and such a description of the relationship within and between traditions can offer for a politics of cultural diversity, however, can be worked out only after exploring MacIntyre's conception of culture, to which we turn in the next section.

Before that, however, there is a point about MacIntyre's view on the incommensurability and untranslatability of

---

<sup>46</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p.276. For a fuller account of MacIntyre's position towards relativism and his argument about untranslatability, Cf. his 'Relativism, Power and Philosophy' reprinted in K. Baynes, J. Bohman & T. McCarthy (eds.), *After Philosophy: End or Transformation?* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT, 1987).

traditions which needs to be considered here. The point is that, as Gordon Graham points out, there is a difficulty in placing MacIntyre's own position in relation to traditions. Graham argues that in offering his interpretation, MacIntyre cannot but take an external, ahistorical stance:

For precisely how we tell the normative story- as one of progress, decline, purification or deviation- will depend on what we identify as the tradition's normatively necessary elements. If we are to avoid arbitrary stipulation on this point (which is what the 'ready-made thought' criticism comes to) and at the same time preserve the normative character, we have no alternative but ahistorical argument of the kind MacIntyre aims to escape.<sup>47</sup>

In his response to Graham, MacIntyre asserts that the concept of a tradition and the criteria for its use and application is itself developed within a particular tradition-based standpoint. But, "[t]his does not preclude its application to the very tradition within which it was developed. Nor does it preclude its being used to frame universal claims about all traditions."<sup>48</sup> He goes on to argue, then, that there is nothing paradoxical in asserting that from within particular traditions assertions of universal import may be and are made, assertions formulated within the limits set by the conceptual, linguistic and argumentative possibilities of that tradition, but assertions which involve the explicit rejection of any incompatible claim, advanced in any terms whatsoever

---

<sup>47</sup> G. Graham, 'MacIntyre's Fusion of History and Philosophy' in J. Horton and S. Mendus (eds.), *After MacIntyre* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1994), p.173.

<sup>48</sup> A. MacIntyre, 'A Partial Response to my Critics' in *After MacIntyre*, p.295.

from any rival standpoint:

So within every major cultural and social tradition we find some distinctive view of human nature and some distinctive conception of human good presented as- *true*. And although these claims to truth are supported within different traditions by appeal to rival and often de facto incommensurable standards of rational justification, no such tradition is or can be relativistic either about the truth of its own assertions or about truth.<sup>49</sup>

Thus the point that MacIntyre's own theory of traditions of moral enquiry is itself derived from a particular tradition and therefore is a tradition-based theory, does not by itself undermine the plausibility of that theory. It is time to understand this theory in more detail.

#### **4. Cultures and Traditions**

In the previous section we observed what a conception of tradition for MacIntyre is, and we saw how traditions of moral enquiry are related to each other. In this section I am going to explore the notion of culture in MacIntyre's thought. In particular I am interested in the relationship between cultures and traditions. My thesis is that the problem of the politics of cultural diversity is best formulated if cultures, or, to be more precise, those features of cultures which are of political significance in respect to the problem of cultural diversity, can be conceived as

---

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p.259.



traditions of moral enquiry. That is to say, as far as the political decision-making process is concerned, the differences between cultural communities are not to be understood as difference between cultures as such, but between cultures as the contexts and resources of traditions of moral enquiry.

We need first to explain the concept of culture as perceived by MacIntyre. In order to do so, we may use his discussion on the five characteristics of the conception of morality in the culture of the *Ninth Edition of the Encyclopaedia Britannia*, of which Adam Gilford was a prominent member. The first is that in that culture, morality was a distinct and relatively autonomous area of beliefs ordered with a scheme of rigid compartmentalisation of life. The moral, therefore, was sharply distinct from the economic, the religious, the legal, and the like. Secondly, morality was primarily a matter of rule-following and ritualised responses to breaches of rules. Thirdly, these rules were chiefly negative prohibitions. Fourthly, it was a culture in which "strong notions of impropriety attached to violations of the compartmentalising boundaries of social life. To know what conversation, what manners, what clothing was appropriate and proper to whom, where, and when was indispensable social and moral knowledge".<sup>50</sup> Fifthly, social agreement, especially in practice and on what morality was and what it consists of, coexisted with intellectual disagreements on the nature of its rational justifications. MacIntyre concludes that

---

<sup>50</sup> MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*, p.26.

moral philosophies always articulate the morality of some particular social and cultural standpoints.

This dependence of morality and moral philosophy is in important parts derived from the role of characters. For MacIntyre, characters are “a very special type of social role which places a certain kind of moral constraint on the personality of those who inhabit them in a way in which many other social roles do not” because “[t]hey furnish recognizable characters and the ability to recognize them is socially crucial because a knowledge of the character provides an interpretation of the actions of those individuals who have assumed the character”.<sup>51</sup> A character is “an object of regard by the members of the culture generally or by some significant segment of them”.<sup>52</sup> Characters, therefore, are certain kinds of social role specific to particular cultures. Thus:

One of the key differences between cultures is the extent to which roles are *characters*; but what is specific to each culture is in large and central part what is specific to its stock of *characters*. So the culture of Victorian England was partially defined by the *characters* of the Public School Headmaster, the Explorer and the Engineer; and that of Wilhelmine Germany was similarly defined by such *characters* as those of the Prussian Officer, the Professor and the Social Democrat.<sup>53</sup>

We have seen that, in MacIntyre's view, modern moral philosophy (and liberalism as its political ideology) fails to

---

<sup>51</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 27.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.* p.29

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.* p.28.

understand the relation between the self and the community. We have seen also that his virtue-based critique of liberal individualism argues that the liberal tradition falls short in providing our lives with an essential structure, continuity and moral coherence. In order to remedy such failures, MacIntyre appeals to an essentially Aristotelian theory and elucidates a unitary core of the virtues through his accounts of practices, the narrative order of a human life and traditions of moral enquiry.

It is on the basis of such an understanding that he criticises the form of existing universities and suggests that universities should be places "where conceptions of and standards of rational justification are elaborated, put to work in the detailed practices of enquiry, and themselves rationally evaluated, so that only from the university can the wider society learn how to conduct its own debates, practical or theoretical, in a rationally defensible way".<sup>54</sup> This, of course, requires fundamental changes in universities because "that claim itself can be plausibly and justifiably advanced only when and insofar as the university is a place where rival and antagonistic views of rational justification, such as those of genealogists and Thomists, are afforded the opportunity both to develop their own enquiries, in practice and in the articulation of the theory of that practice, and to conduct their intellectual and moral warfare".<sup>55</sup>

---

<sup>54</sup> MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*, p.222.

<sup>55</sup> *ibid.*, p.222.

When it comes to politics, MacIntyre favours political communities for it is within such social units that participation (in its broad sense) is possible. The moral individualism of liberalism, he argues, is itself a solvent of participatory community:

For liberalism in its practice as well as in much of its theory promotes a vision of the social world as an arena in which each individual, in pursuit of the achievement of whatever she or he takes to be her or his good, needs to be protected from other such individuals by the enforcement of individual rights. Moral argument within liberalism cannot therefore begin from some conception of a genuinely common good that is more than the sum of the preferences of individuals.<sup>56</sup>

Argument to, from and about such a conception of the common good, however, is integral to the practice of participatory community. MacIntyre believes what is most urgently needed in our time is:

[A] politics of self-defence for all those local societies that aspire to achieve some relatively self-sufficient and independent form of participatory practice-based community and that therefore need to protect themselves from the corrosive effects of capitalism and the depredation of state power.<sup>57</sup>

Defending a politics of the common good, therefore, political

---

<sup>56</sup> A. MacIntyre, *Marxism & Christianity* (2nd ed.) (London: Duckworth, 1995), p.xxii.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p.xxvi.

community can be observed as his ideal.

In order to illustrate the implications of MacIntyre's account of traditions of moral enquiry for our discussion, let me provide an example which is directly concerned with the problem of cultural diversity in liberal democracies in the West, i.e. the well-known 'Satanic Verses' affair. There were at least two significant views about the 'Satanic Verses' issue in Britain. On the one hand, there was the liberal argument which, based on the principle of toleration, argued for freedom of speech and, therefore, opposed any action against the book. On the other hand, the British Muslim community argued that in accordance with the Islamic law, the book must be banned. Since enough has been said about the liberal position and the kind of rationality upon which it is based, here I shall only outline the rationality behind the Muslims' argument. From the Islamic point of view, the relation between Man and the world can be summarised as follows:

The spiritual understanding of life and a moral sense of life are the two principles that are the ground for the new moral criterion which Islam lays down for humankind. This criterion is the satisfaction of God, be He exalted. The satisfaction of God that Islam erects as a general criterion in life is that which steers the human ship to the shore of righteousness, goodness and justice.<sup>58</sup>

---

<sup>58</sup> M. B. As-Sadr, *Our Philosophy*, trans. S. C. Inati (London: The Muhammad: Trust and KPI Ltd, 1987), c.30.

Man should know, therefore, about the path which leads him in this direction. Now while human reasoning is considered as the only and supreme source of rationality in the liberal modernist tradition, the Islamic tradition views it as secondary and incomplete:

Through the prophets we get access to a new source of knowledge about the beginning and the end of this world and the way of leading an upright life. A man cut-off from the prophets has access to only one source of knowledge, viz. his own thinking and experience. But the man attached to the prophets has two sources: his own thinking and experience as well as revelation.<sup>59</sup>

However, "reason is a mere approximation and notwithstanding the fact that it has the form of a scientific law and has enough practical value, its significance is only relative".<sup>60</sup> Thus, while Muslims believed that their position was rationally defensible, the validity of their view was not dependent on the source of rational justification held in the modernist liberal culture. Their demand, therefore, cannot be dismissed by liberals as irrational or rationally unjustified solely by appealing to rationally justified liberal arguments, because it is based on a different kind of rationality.

---

<sup>59</sup> M. Beheshti and M. J. Bahonar, *Philosophy of Islam*, trans. M. A. Ansari (Karachi: Islamic Seminary of Pakistan, 1990), p.143.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.* p.144.

The above example, however, indicates a problem for which a MacIntyrian kind of politics does not supply what is needed. Suppose that cultural communities are to be given to some extent independence so that they can adopt kinds of politics which accord with their shared conception of the good life. But what about the political relations between communities? Since different political communities may hold different (and sometimes even conflicting) conceptions of the good, certainly such relations cannot be based on any such conception. It seems that MacIntyre has not provided any convincing answer to this problem yet.

## 5. Conclusion

MacIntyre believes that modern morality is in a state of disorder and the way in which moral disagreement takes place today is the symptom of this disorder. According to him, we live in an emotivist culture which holds moral judgments as nothing but expressions of personal feeling or attitudes. The self is now thought of as lacking any necessary social identity because the kind of social identity that it once enjoyed is no longer available; and as criterionless because the kind of *telos* in terms of which it once judged and acted is no longer thought to be credible. The absence of the notion of *telos* has resulted in the unclear

relationship between conceptions of human nature and moral precepts which enable man to pass from one stage to the other. Thus modern moral theory which has emerged as the product of the failure of the Enlightenment project has sought to devise either devising some new teleology (as in utilitarianism) or some new categorical status for moral rules (as in Kantianism).

MacIntyre argues that there are no rights as understood by modern thinkers in terms of rights attaching to human beings *qua* human beings and, therefore, natural or human rights are fictitious. Rather, we should search for the conceptions of man and his *telos* and form a virtue-based moral theory. This requires that we develop the concepts of practice, narrative self and traditions, exploration of which have been presented in this chapter. For MacIntyre, the unity of human life is the unity of a narrative quest for a conception of the good which enables us to order other goods and extend our understanding of the purpose and content of the virtues. An agent's identity is in key parts what he or she inherits and a specific past that is present in his or her present.

MacIntyre argues that there is no line of moral enquiry which has derived and changed throughout the history of philosophy, but rival traditions of moral enquiry, each consisting of a conception of the good for the pursuit of which that particular tradition is constituted. What constitutes a tradition is



a conflict of interpretations of that tradition and all traditions involve epistemological crisis. Contrary to what has been thought, therefore, his argument of traditions does not rule out criticism from within.

In MacIntyre's view, therefore, cultures are contexts and resources of traditions of moral enquiry. It is important to see what implications such an account of culture brings about:

First, from this view, every morality and every moral theory belongs to a particular cultural context. Accordingly, two or more competing moral philosophies may have a common culture or they may have different cultural contexts.

Second, the account of culture which is offered here is less ambiguous than those of the liberal modernist which will be studied in the second part. Unlike theirs, the relation between culture and morality is clearly discussed. On the basis of this account, the role of different modes of moral enquiry in different cultures can be easily explained and the sources of the differences between cultural communities can be clearly understood. What makes the British Muslim community different from the majority of Christian-originated British, for instance, is the different tradition of moral enquiry which each holds.

Third, in the light of this account, where politics is concerned, the existent diversity between cultural communities goes far beyond the preservation of this or that cultural

community in terms of some components of a culture such as the language. The politics of cultural diversity concerns the very foundations of the political decision-making process, i.e. the moral values in accordance with which policies are designed for. So the foreign relationship of a country is as much concerned with cultural diversity as education and the health system.

Fourth, unlike the liberal conceptions of culture, no cultural community is excluded from a politics of cultural diversity on this account. Because no superiority is supposed for any particular culture or cultures, no exception is suggested. Every cultural community, no matter how different its culture from the dominant liberal cultures, has to be considered in such a kind of politics.

There is also a fifth implication of MacIntyre's account, which I shall develop in more detail in the concluding chapter, which points at the two possible levels at which moral precepts and concepts can be considered: one at which cultural particularities are of central importance so that the distinction between different traditions of moral enquiry is at its fullest extent; and the other at which universally acceptable moral concepts, though very thin, are concerned. The former is the form of politics observable in political communities, the latter suspicious of providing the basis of policy making since it is too thin to supply what is needed. This classification, however, as will

be discussed later, can be used as very helpful guidelines for the politics of cultural diversity. Before that, however, we need to see what our two other selected communitarians have to offer.

## CHAPTER 4

### TAYLOR: POLITICS AND THE RECOGNITION OF CULTURES

We saw in the previous chapter that MacIntyre challenges the liberal individualist viewpoint which has dominated modern philosophy for the last three hundred years by showing that the project of Enlightenment has virtually failed; and we saw the implications of his arguments for the politics of multiculturalism. In this chapter Charles Taylor's criticism of modern moral and political theory will be examined. Although both MacIntyre and Taylor hold an Aristotelian view of morality (though Taylor in a much looser sense), their attitudes towards liberal values are different: whereas MacIntyre argues for an Augustinian-Thomist Aristotelianist tradition of moral enquiry as more appropriate than the modern vision. Taylor maintains that "perhaps the essence of the moral vision can be saved in a more sophisticated variant which takes account of this" since "some facets at least of the ideal of modern freedom have great appeal".<sup>1</sup> Here I shall try to explore his position towards multicultural politics through a study which concentrates mainly on those of his works which are more relevant to the purpose of my discussion: *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, *The Ethics of*

---

<sup>1</sup> C. Taylor, 'Justice After Virtue' in J. Horton and S. Mendus (eds.), *After MacIntyre* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1994), p.21.

*Authenticity*, some of the papers in his *Philosophical Papers* and *The Politics of Recognition*.<sup>2</sup> The present chapter consists of four sections: in the first, in order to pursue the first two themes mentioned before, i.e. the conception of the self and the conception of morality. I shall outline how in Taylor's view morality and culture are related, i.e. that cultural context is viewed as a source of morality and that moral theories should be read against their cultural contexts. Next I shall relate his view to the charge of relativism. Section 3 is concerned with the third theme, i.e. the relation between politics and culture and we will see why he believes that modern politics is in its very nature contradictory. Section 4 will conclude the arguments of this chapter.

## **1. The Cultural Context of Morality**

I mentioned above very briefly that, like other communitarians, Taylor believes that the study of moral values cannot be separated from the study of the cultural context within which they are held. This raises the question of the nature of the relationship between culture and morality. In order to understand this relationship we need to know what Taylor thinks morality is

---

<sup>2</sup> C. Taylor, *Philosophical Papers* (2 vols.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); C. Taylor, *Sources of the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); C. Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1991); C. Taylor, 'The Politics of Recognition' in A. Gutmann (ed.) *Multiculturalism and Politics of Recognition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

and what he perceives as moral enquiry. Contrary to the dominant mode of moral philosophy which has given a narrow focus to morality as the philosophy of right, Taylor believes that defining the nature of the good life, too, is a concern of moral enquiry. In his view, the emergence of right-based theories is the consequence of the rise of *atomism* by which he means "a view about nature and the human condition which (among other things) makes a doctrine of the primacy of rights plausible"<sup>3</sup>, or to put it negatively, a view in the absence of which this doctrine (and Taylor has mainly Robert Nozick's in mind) is suspect, to the point of being virtually untenable.

This is not to say that conceptions of right do not play any role in moral enquiry. Rather, what Taylor tries to show is that while the concern of modern moral philosophy has been exclusively the investigation of the moral principles which should govern our relations to others (which he describes later as the morality of obligation), another important goal of moral enquiry which concerns our dignity and conception of the good life has been widely ignored, or made to seem problematic. What these latter have in common with issues which are normally described as the moral is that they too involve what Taylor has called 'strong evaluation':

[T]hey involve discriminations of right or wrong, better or worse, higher or lower, which are not

---

<sup>3</sup> Taylor, 'Atomism' in *Philosophical Papers*, Vol. 2, p.189.

rendered valid by our own desires, inclinations, or choices, but rather stand independent of these and offer standards by which they can be judged.<sup>4</sup>

By adopting a wrong model of practical reasoning which is borrowed from, or at least is shaped by, a particular view of reasoning in natural science, modern moral philosophers have been tempted to deny that our moral reactions are not only 'gut' feelings but also implicit acknowledgements of claims concerning their objects, and that various ontological accounts try to articulate such claims.

In Taylor's view, what distinguishes the modern West from other civilisations is its formulation of the principle of respect which is understood in terms of rights. The role of these rights is that they govern our relationships with others. Consequently, what establishes our relation to ourselves, i.e. what constitutes a meaningful life, has been left out of moral enquiry. In addition, there is a range of notions concerned with our dignity which can be briefly described as "our sense of ourselves as commanding (attitudinal) respect" which point out our concerns with the way we are seen by others.<sup>5</sup> These three axes of moral thinking exist in every culture. What makes moral thinking different in different cultures is the way these axes are conceived and the way they are related. The doubts which have been spread over the second axis

---

<sup>4</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p.4.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p.15.

by the modern moral philosophy of the West, have made moral frameworks, in virtue of which we make sense of our lives, spiritually, problematic. But since “[n]ot to have a framework is to fall into a life which is spiritually senseless”, the ignorance of the significant role which moral frameworks play in shaping of our lives has resulted in the moral crisis of the contemporary western societies.<sup>6</sup> Hence the various attempts nowadays made for discovering the meaning of the life. Taylor’s aim, therefore, is to provide a defence of his claim that doing without frameworks is impossible for us. He bases his argument on the proposition that the horizons within which we live our moral lives have to include what he calls “strong qualitative discriminations of the incomparably higher” and that living with such qualified horizons is constitutive of human life.<sup>7</sup> This is where his argument is related to the problem of identity:

To know who I am is a species of knowing where I stand. My identity is defined by the commitments and identifications which provide the frame or horizon within which I can try to determine from case to case what is good, or valuable, or what ought to be done, or what I endorse or oppose. In other words, it is the horizon within which I am capable of taking a stand.<sup>8</sup>

To know who I am, is to be oriented in moral space in which

---

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.* p.18.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.* p.26.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.* p.27.



questions arise about what is good or bad, and what is trivial and secondary. One part of this way of approaching the notion of identity is concerned with the historical developments of both universal commitment, (like adherence to a religious faith) and particular identifications (such as nationality). The other part of the problem is concerned with the question 'who', i.e. to place someone as a potential interlocutor in a society of interlocutors, which is involved in comprehending our identity in terms of our relationships with others and our social roles. In order to answer such a question, one needs to know where he stands. As can easily be seen, this view is in contrast with the naturalist supposition that we might be able to do without frameworks: a supposition which is based on a different conception of human agency. On the basis of the latter, frameworks are invented by us.

Taylor finds this account wrong and we need to see why. The answer lies in his understanding of human agency as social interlocutors. He argues that the general feature of human life is its 'dialogical' character: "[w]e become full human agents, capable of understanding ourselves, and hence of defining an identity, through our acquisition of rich human language of expression".<sup>9</sup> But "[i]t's not just that we learn the language in dialogue and then can go on to use them for our own purpose on our own. This describes our situation to some extent in our

---

<sup>9</sup> Taylor. *The Ethics of Authenticity*, p.33.

culture".<sup>10</sup> Thus it is a continuous inter-action with others. A question which may arise here is whether according to this account we are the prisoners of our dialogical character. Is not it possible for us to break out of this web of interlocution? Taylor's reply is that even if we relate ourselves to the community defined by adherence to the good, it does not sever our dependence on webs of interlocution, though the webs and the nature of our dependence are changed. Even in the case of the solitary artist, the work is itself addressed to a future audience: "[t]he very form of a work of art shows its character as addressed".<sup>11</sup>

None of these arguments, however, establishes by itself that qualitative distinctions (which define moral frameworks), are indispensable to us. Taylor argues further that our orientation to the good underlines "one of the most basic aspirations of human beings, the need to be connected to, or in contact with, what they see as good, or of crucial importance, or of fundamental value".<sup>12</sup> Thus it matters to us where we stand in relation to them. Furthermore, it matters to us where we are going. Consequently:

Since we cannot do without an orientation to the good, and since we cannot be indifferent to our place relative to this good, and since this place is something that must always change and become, the issue of the direction of our lives must arise for

---

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* p.33.

<sup>11</sup> Taylor, *The Politics of Recognition*. p.34.

<sup>12</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*. p.42.

And this sense of the good is a part of our understanding of our lives as unfolding stories, or, as we saw in the previous chapter, what MacIntyre describes as the narrativity of our lives.

Taylor argues against an account of moral enquiry according to which goods or values are understood as projections of ours onto a world which is in itself neutral. Accordingly, such projects can be seen in two ways: either it is, as some philosophers like Hare have discussed, something we can bring under voluntary control, or it is something deeply involuntary, as it is perceived by sociobiologists. Both versions suggest that it is possible to offer non-evaluative descriptions which are extensionally equivalent to each of our value terms. Against the former version of this account, it has been argued that descriptive meaning cannot be separated from evaluation, and against the latter it has been argued that the whole parallel to secondary properties is inappropriate.

The next step which Taylor takes for defining his position is that not only do we live with many goods but that we rank them in terms of attributing supreme importance to one of them in relation to the others. In addition to this recognition of higher goods, we can also recognise 'hypergoods': "goods which not only are incomparably more important than others but provide the

---

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* p. 47.

standpoint from which these must be weighed, judged, decided about".<sup>14</sup> These hypergoods, too, are culturally dependent since they define the 'moral' in a culture, i.e. "a set of ends or demands which not only have unique importance, but also override and allow us to judge others".<sup>15</sup>

But the recognition of one hypergood rather than another is a source of tension in moral life. Against this, two strategies have been held throughout the history of moral thought: the first is the entire denial of any credentials of any good which stands in the way of the hypergood (as for Plato); and the second is to affirm all goods (as for Aristotle) or at least a range of goods (as for contemporary philosophers like Rawls). Thus, what follows this is to ask whether there is any rational way for one to convince others that his hypergood perspective is superior, and if there is not, how he convinces himself. Taylor believes that such problems arise from a naturalist epistemology. There would be no such problem if we show that practical reasoning, as he argues, is a 'reasoning in transition'. It aims to establish, not that some position is correct absolutely, but rather that some position is superior to some other. It is concerned, covertly or openly, implicitly or explicitly, with comparative propositions:

We show one of these comparative claims to be well founded when we can show that the *move*

---

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, p.63.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p.63.

from A to B constitutes a gain epistemically. This is something we do when we show, for instance, that we get from A to B by identifying and resolving a contradiction in A or a confusion which A relied on, or by acknowledging the importance of some factor which A screened out, or something of the sort. The argument fixes on the nature of the transition from A to B.<sup>16</sup>

The nerve of the rational proof consists in showing that this transition is an error-reducing one. The argument turns on rival interpretations of possible transitions from A to B, or B to A. This epistemological view of practical reasoning demands a very different conception of moral thinking. It is distinct from what Taylor calls 'external modes of practical reasoning' which offers a reason in terms of some external considerations which are not anchored in our moral intuitions and provides a naturalistic picture of human life. The kind of moral reasoning which Taylor suggests offers a reason in the sense of articulating what is crucial to the shape of the moral world in one's best account, in which the perception of a hypergood helps to define his or her identity.

Moreover, it is also distinct from the 'obligatory model' of morality. According to such a model, we give reasons for a certain moral principle or injunction whereby we show that the act enjoined has some crucial property which confers this force on it. From this standpoint, we ask what makes a given action

---

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.* p.72.

right and we search for a basic reason. This is the kind of moral philosophy, represented by both utilitarianism and Kantianism, which tries to organise everything around one basic reason. Liberalism, both classical (as for J. S. Mill) and contemporary (as for Rawls), is based on this conception of morality. Accordingly, morality is conceived purely as a guide to action, thought to be concerned purely with what it is right to do rather than with what it is good to be. In a related way, the task of moral theory is identified by liberalism as defining the content of obligation rather than the nature of the good life:

In other words, morals concern what we *ought* to *do*: this excludes both what it is good to do, even though we aren't *obliged* (which is why supererogation is such a problem for some contemporary moral philosophy), and also what it may be good (or even obligatory) to *be* or *love*, as irrelevant to ethics. In this conception there is no place for the notion of the good in either of the two common traditional senses: either the good life, or the good as the object of our love or allegiance.<sup>17</sup>

Now, to accept Taylor's account is to move from external action description to the language of 'qualitative distinctions'. It requires the adoption of a language of thick description "which is a lot richer and more culturally bound, because it articulates the significance and point that actions or feelings have within a

---

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p.79.

certain culture".<sup>18</sup> This is why the modern moral philosophies of obligatory action deny a place for qualitative discriminations, and, consequently, the cultural dependence of moral theory altogether. But apart from such epistemological and metaphysical naturalistic preference, as Taylor argues, there are at least four moral motives for which the moral philosophies of obligatory action stick to their narrow conception of morality: (i) the defence of ordinary life and desire against the demands of higher goods; (ii) the modern conception of freedom; (iii) a particular reading of the demands of benevolence and altruism; and (iv) the desire for a fully universal ethics. Note that this last motive is of particular importance for our discussion since the goods which are articulated through qualitative discriminations are usually those which are embedded in different ways of life and distinguish cultural communities from each other. However, as Bernard Williams has discussed, in order to avoid such particularities and focusing on obligation, modern moral philosophy has its own motivation which can be identified in its attachment to a hypergood: the good of purity.<sup>19</sup>

Although it has been shown that central to Taylor's project of reconstructing our understanding of morality and moral theory is the conception of the good, little has been done to show what he actually means by the good so far. The good is, he

---

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* p.80.

<sup>19</sup> B. Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (London: Fontana Press, 1985), pp.194-195.

argues, “whatever is picked out as incomparably higher in a qualitative distinction” which “can be some action, or motive, or style of life, which is seen as qualitatively superior”.<sup>20</sup> Taylor later develops this general definition through classifying goods into two groups: first, there are ‘constitutive goods’ which define and constitute both the goodness of certain actions or aspirations and the love of which moves us to good action. They are, in other words, “something the love of which empowers us to do and be good”.<sup>21</sup> In the second group, there are goods which are defined through qualitative distinctions between actions, feelings or modes of life. Obviously, these latter are considered as facets or components of a good life and are called by Taylor ‘life goods’. This distinction takes the discussion far beyond the moral theories of obligatory action which are, though unadmittedly, based on adherence to certain life goods such as freedom, altruism and universal justice. But are not such theories themselves based on a constitutive good as well? Taylor argues that there actually are constitutive goods which stand behind them: In Kant’s theory, for instance, it is that of rational agency which stands above the rest of the universe. Thus, it can be considered as the moral source of his theory. Constitutive goods play a crucial role in constituting our identity: “In fact our visions of the good are tied up with our understanding of the self” which

---

<sup>20</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p.92.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 93.



is accompanied by the kinds of narratives by which we make sense of our lives; and the conceptions of society.<sup>22</sup>

The above discussion shows us clearly enough how these four elements form the sources of the modern self. In a way, it shows us what kind of understanding of cultural identity follows it; a point to which I will return in the last section of this chapter.

## **2. Against Relativism**

In the previous section we observed that Taylor holds a particular view of morality: it is particular in terms of offering an account of moral theory which is in many respects different from the dominant modern view of moral philosophy articulated by the philosophy of the seventeenth century in the West and mostly developed by the analytical philosophy of the twentieth century. Taylor's account, however, faces at least three possible objections: that of relativism, that of subjectivism and one which can be loosely called social determinism. The first is concerned with the following question: if morality and moral theories are, as Taylor discusses, so deeply culturally dependent, should we give up the making of value judgments about different moral systems altogether? If we believe that the value of every moral theory is only comprehensible against its cultural context and the conception of the good which it has as its goal stands on a

---

<sup>22</sup> *ibid.* p.105.

particular culture within which it has been articulated, how are we to compare different moral theories and weigh them against each other?

A second charge against Taylor's account could be that if there is no place for the kind of objectivism as inspired by modern social sciences, does it not follow that the moral ideal and conception of good held by one is neither commensurable to others nor subject to others' judgment or criticism, but only subject to one's preference?

The third objection questions the role of our ties with our communities: to what extent are we free to shape our lives in the direction we like (which may be different from those of our community) if our identity is dependent on the recognition we seek from others? And how far are we free to do what we like with our lives while we live in modern and complex technological societies like ours? Are we, after all, locked in an iron cage?

Let us deal with the first and second charges together, since they are closely related. The two are known as a kind of moral relativism and subjectivism both of which, Taylor mentions, enjoy significant popularity these days (particularly among universities) in the West. The idea is that each person has his or her own values, about which it is impossible to argue. It has two features: an epistemological component which argues for the limits of what reason can establish; and a moral component which claims that

one ought not to challenge another's values since it is their choice and should be respected. For such a view is based on a notion of self-fulfilment. Taylor argues that we should not reject it entirely on the ground of narcissism or hedonism; or explain it simply as a kind of egoism, because by doing so we would miss the moral force which lies behind it: one which is grounded on the ideal of authenticity, through which we can distinguish its contemporary version from moral laxity which has always existed. The popular relativism of our time (which Taylor calls 'soft relativism') can be rejected instead by appealing to its self-distructing characteristics. Against the claim of soft relativism (which is tied closely to a general presumption of subjectivism about values) which holds that the person determines what is significant for himself, Taylor argues that in order to define ourselves we need to find what is significant in our difference from others, which in turn requires a special explanation. Now there is a possibility that this explanation could be wrong and, therefore, we may replace it with a better account. Thus "[y]our feeling a certain way can never be sufficient grounds for respecting your position, because your feeling can't *determine* what is significant".<sup>23</sup>

One may ask whether Taylor's own account implies a kind of moral subjectivism. To answer this question we need to remember that Taylor believes that instead of appealing to wrong

---

<sup>23</sup> Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, p.37.

models of moral enquiry based on the kind of objectivity which we find in natural sciences, we need to ask “[w]hat better measure of reality do we have in human affairs than those terms which on critical reflection and after correction of the errors we can detect make the best sense of our lives”.<sup>24</sup> This includes “not only offering the best, most realistic orientation about the good but also allowing us best to understand and make sense of the actions and feelings of ourselves and others”.<sup>25</sup> He calls it the ‘BA principle’. Human science cannot be couched in terms of physics: “Our value terms purport to give us insight into what it is to live in the universe as a human being, and this is a quite different matter from that which physical science claims to reveal and explain”.<sup>26</sup> Thus while reality is dependent on us “in the sense that a condition for its existence is our existence”<sup>27</sup> once granted that we exist “it is no more a subjective projection than what physics deals with”.<sup>28</sup> Thus, while not based on the kind of objectivism borrowed from natural science, his account need not be understood in terms of moral subjectivism.

But does not the cultural dependence of moral values imply relativism? If one holds that certain goods are only granted within a certain cultural form and that human societies differ in their cultures. does not this result in a relativist view according to

---

<sup>24</sup> Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p.57.

<sup>25</sup> *ibid*, p.57.

<sup>26</sup> *ibid*, p.59.

<sup>27</sup> *ibid*, p.59.

<sup>28</sup> *ibid*, p.59.

which rival moralities cannot be evaluated? Here, Taylor distinguishes the incommensurability of culturally different moralities from other relativist claims. Unlike other attempts to relativise the good, he thinks that there is a real possibility that there may be different kinds of human realisation which are incommensurable, though he insists that he doubts if it is true.<sup>29</sup> Such a possible incommensurability of cultures, however, is different from the claim that the goods of another culture are not combinable with one's own since the latter presupposes that one can understand and recognise them in other cultures. Taylor believes that while commensurability seems to have been attained within certain limits, it is still a question of fact how far it can be extended. Thus, until we meet this limit, there is no reason not to think of the goods we are trying to define and criticize as universal, provided we afford the same status to those of other societies we are trying to understand. However,

This does *not* mean of course that all our, or all their, supposed goods will turn out at the end of the day to be defensible as such: just that we don't start with a preshrunk moral universe in which we take as given that their goods have nothing to say to us or perhaps ours to them.<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup> The doubt cast on this kind of incommensurability is probably due to Taylor's argument for the possibility of rational (though not global) superiority of some cultures over others in his discussion about theoretical and atheoretical cultures in 'Rationality' (Philosophical Papers Vol.2). He does not make it clear there, however, whether or not his argument of transcultural judgments of superiority is applicable to incommensurable theoretical cultures as well.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.* p.62.

The last possible criticism against Taylor's position on morality which we study here points at the connection which his theory make between one's identity and the cultural context of his communal surrounding. The criticism may be outlined as follows: Many critics of modernity have argued that modern societies has pushed us in certain directions like atomism and instrumentalism. From this, many have concluded that in modern forms of society, the person does not have the degree of freedom which he usually thinks he has. Societies generate outlooks which are particular to them, since the norms which are held within them are the outcomes of particular social institutions they have. In other words it is these social institutions which breed philosophy.

Two replies can be given from Taylor's position. The first, which is given by Taylor himself, maintains that "[w]e don't want to exaggerate our degrees of freedom. But they are not zero".<sup>31</sup> He argues that "[h]uman beings and their societies are much more complex that any simple theory can account for"<sup>32</sup> and although we are pushed in the direction of the philosophies of atomism and instrumentalism, "it is still the case that there are many points of resistance, and that these are constantly being generated"<sup>33</sup> like the environmentalist movement we observe today. This response, as can be seen, concerns a form of

---

<sup>31</sup> Taylor, *Ethics of Authenticity*, pp.100-101.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p.99.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p.99.

determinism which is argued from the sociological point of view.

Another way to respond to charges of social determinism, which can be used against the criticism made by those modern liberal theorists who worry about individual autonomy, can be worked out from Taylor's discussion about social criticism. While, for Taylor, horizons of identity are given, they are nevertheless open to criticism. Moreover, only if we are free to choose our way of life it is possible to speak of life as a 'quest'. The identification of the dependence of our identities on our cultural contexts does not imply that we are locked in iron cage. Rather, it offers a better understanding of ourselves in connection with our cultural community and a more adequate picture of our identity in terms of what we are and where we go.

But while making a clear distinction from the kind of relativism and subjectivism which most post-modernist theories hold; and the kind of social determinism to which many sociological theories lead, as I shall show in the next section, Taylor's discussion about incommensurability of cultures leaves us without any definite answer to a wide range of cases where rival moral theories are held within different cultural contexts. It might be mentioned here that, as will be shown below, in this respect MacIntyre's position towards rival traditions of moral enquiry provides us with a comparatively more helpful account than Taylor's.

### 3. Politics and Cultural Diversity

Taylor makes his position towards the politics of cultural diversity clearer in that group of his arguments which are more specifically concerned with politics. He characterises the substance of modern politics as 'the politics of recognition'. It is on the basis of this characteristic of modern politics that most claims of multiculturalism (as well as political feminism) have been made, since central to such claims is the notion of equal recognition. Taylor distinguishes two significant changes which have made the modern notion of recognition and identity available: first, the collapse of social hierarchies which was the basis for honour. Since honour is intrinsically linked to inequalities, the modern notion of 'dignity' recognises the inherent dignity of human being which when it comes to politics is understood as citizen dignity which is shared universally by everyone.

The second change is the new understanding of individualised identity, one which is particular to each citizen. This notion arises along with the idea of authenticity, mainly articulated by Herder, which gives moral significance to the differences between human beings. According to the idea of authenticity, each person has his or her own measure, through



understanding of which one gives point to his or her life. The idea of authenticity, so understood, is itself an outcome of the decline of the hierarchical society in which one was identified by social position. Taylor rightly argues that what undermined this socially derived identification was not the birth of democratic society, but the idea of authenticity, since it is the latter which calls on one to discover his or her own original way of being which, it was claimed, cannot be socially derived but is generated inwardly. However, as we saw in the preceding section, the crucial feature of human life is its fundamentally dialogical character and, therefore, Taylor argues that there is no such a thing as inward generation:

Thus my discovering my own identity doesn't mean that I work it out in isolation, but that I negotiate it through dialogue, partly overt, partly internal, with others. That is why the development of an ideal of inwardly generated identity gives a new importance to recognition. My own identity crucially depends on my dialogical relations with others.<sup>34</sup>

By understanding the modern individualised identification, it is easy to see the contradiction in modern politics. On the one hand, with the move from honour to dignity has come a 'politics of universalism' with the aim of equalising rights and entitlements which for some concerns civil rights and voting rights and for others extends into the socioeconomic sphere. On the other

---

<sup>34</sup> Taylor, *The Politics of Recognition*, p.34.

hand, however, the modern conception of identity has given rise to a 'politics of difference'. Thus "[w]ith the politics of equal dignity, what is established is meant to be universally the same, an identical basket of rights and immunities; with the politics of difference, what we are asked to recognize is the unique identity of this individual or group, their distinctness from everyone else".<sup>35</sup>

Now, the liberal theory of neutrality, which is characteristically blind to differences, while insisting on the equal dignity of all citizens, fails to recognise the unique identity for which everyone should be recognised and, therefore, assimilates the distinctions the respect for which is the goal of the idea of authenticity. These two modes of politics, which are both based on the notion of equal respect, come into conflict since one requires a difference-blind principle for governmental policy-making whereas the other claims that such neutral and difference-blind principles reflect a hegemonic culture which are both inhuman, because they suppress identities, and discriminatory. But, if the goal of the politics of difference is to guarantee the survival of cultural communities, can it be served in a proceduralist liberal society? It would mean, for instance, that in multi-lingual societies people should be able to act for the preservation of languages which are spoken by different cultural minorities. Taylor, however, sees such a politics as incapable of

---

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. p.38.

capturing what he describes as “the full thrust of policies designed for cultural survival”<sup>36</sup> since cultural survival also involves the assurance that there is a community of people both now and in the future who want to use such languages. i.e. a politics of cultural survival is also concerned with creating members of such cultural communities. It is this feature of the actual demands made by cultural communities which liberal theorists like Kymlicka, who try to offer a politics of difference within the liberal theory of neutrality, fail to recognise.

Against this argument of Taylor, however, Daniel Weinstock argues that a liberal model of state neutrality like the one which is offered by John Rawls, is more likely to ensure the social conditions required for the development of Taylor’s argument of human agents as strong evaluators than any form of political organisation centred around a conception of the common good. Since his criticism and Taylor’s reply are helpful in providing a better understanding of the position which Taylor defends, it is worth discussing them in depth. In order to show the above claim, Weinstock begins by pointing out that Taylor’s account of agency is best understood as a normative thesis. “describing the manner in which human beings deliberate practically *at their best*, when they are fully instantiating some potentiality latent within all humans”<sup>37</sup> since in Taylor’s view, strong evaluation is a

---

<sup>36</sup> *ibid* p.58.

<sup>37</sup> D. M. Weinstock, ‘The political theory of strong evaluation’ in J. Tully (ed.), *Philosophy in an Age of Pluralism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p.174.

*capacity* which marks persons off from other types of living creatures. If it is understood normatively in terms of a capacity, what follows is the conditions upon which it can be fully developed. Weinstock claims that:

[I]n the context of modern societies marked a vast array of coexisting conceptions of the good and of quite different cultural forms, the political conditions required for the development of the capacities involved in strong evaluation are best secured under liberal institutions which prescind from promoting any particular conception of the good or cultural form.<sup>38</sup>

As we have seen, Taylor offers a range of objections which target liberal practice of the neutrality of the state. These objections are that first of all, the liberal neutrality is a morally unattractive goal since it prevents citizens from pursuing certain legitimate collective goods through political institutions. Secondly, it places moral obstacles in the way of a community's enacting measures to oppose practices and ways of life which strike at the very foundations of its traditions and institutions. As a result, since the existence of such traditions and institutions is not guaranteed in the future, liberal neutrality can practically become self-defeating. In response to the first objection, Weinstock points out that from the perspective of Rawls' theory of justice, the distinction between the interests of presently existing people and

---

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p.176.

those of future generations is untenable. If cultural good is a primary good, Weinstock argues that for Rawls, cultural primary goods cannot be secured fairly by the basic institutions of society for already existing people without provision being made for future persons to enjoy the same level of security.<sup>39</sup> And if cultural good is understood in terms of self-respect as the most important primary good, then the social conditions which underpin it must be distributed fairly. But this does not require that the state favours one conception of the good over others.

In response to Taylor's second objection, Weinstock argues that if by this objection Taylor is pointing out the limits of the liberal state in tolerating other cultures, it does not undermine the neutrality of the state. Rather, it shows that practices of liberal neutrality have bounds.<sup>40</sup>

In his reply to Weinstock, Taylor makes his position towards liberal neutrality clear by arguing that for him, neutrality between various life conceptions is not something in principle wrong. Quite the contrary, it is clearly "an important good, even indispensable in certain contexts of the modern liberal state".<sup>41</sup> What he disagrees about is rather the absolute pretensions of this kind of theory, "the claim to have found *the* principle of liberal society: or the principle which ought to trump all others

---

<sup>39</sup> *ibid.*, p.180.

<sup>40</sup> *ibid.*, p.184.

<sup>41</sup> C. Taylor, 'Response', in *Philosophy in an Age of Pluralism*, p.250.

wherever they come into conflict".<sup>42</sup> In other words, if neutrality is understood as a means which provides a way of dealing with the plurality of goods, Taylor has no difficulty with the idea that offering the greatest scope for different modes of life and conceptions of the good is *an* important goal, but he does not agree that it can be *the* goal.

Taylor then turns to show the weakness of Weinstock's Rawlsian defence of cultural membership as a primary good and its existence for future generations upon which the parties situated in the original position can agree. Rawlsian liberalism cannot encompass cultural continuity because it argues from the needs of existing people. Nor does it help to point out that the original position can include the members of future generations, "because the point is not that their interests are being considered as they might formulate them themselves, prior to any cultural identity; rather *we* are determining now what their cultural identity will be".<sup>43</sup>

Taylor agrees with Weinstock on some discrimination which the liberal principle allows for and maintains that this is not what he is concerned with. Rather, it is the fact that when deciding about policies which shape one's everyday rights, such decisions cannot take place without any conception of the good. And then, since we cannot give people everything they want when it comes

---

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.* p. 250.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.* p. 251

to social spending, we have to make judgments about the relative weight and worth of different demands. Taylor concludes:

Neutral liberalism as a total principle seems to me here a formula for paralysis; or else for hypocrisy, if one tried to conclude the real reasons. It is at this point that it begins to appear more than costly; in truth, inapplicable.<sup>44</sup>

Hence the kind of liberalism which Taylor defends. Thus, both Weinstock and Taylor share the idea that the liberal state should draw limits in order to discriminate non-permissible from permissible cultures in a liberal society. Weinstock believes that this is the natural outcome of the liberal commitment to toleration which requires that it allows freedom only to those cultures which respect liberal conceptions of freedom. As he puts it, "a liberal regime need not countenance conceptions of the good which recommend actions the intent of which is to destroy the institutions within the context of which alone the pursuit of diverse conceptions of the good is possible".<sup>45</sup> Taylor holds the same idea but on the ground that the survival of the liberal culture itself is in need of state support, so neutrality is a good among other goods. In other words, both Weinstock and Taylor agree that the principle of neutrality cannot be justified neutrally. They are also agreed that there should be limits to state

---

<sup>44</sup> *ibid.* p.253.

<sup>45</sup> *ibid.* p.187.

neutrality. The difference between the two comes into sight when the state should decide about such limits: while Taylor's argument shows that such limits are necessarily liberal because the principle of neutrality alone cannot ground them, Weinstock's argument seems unable to work them out merely by appealing to neutrality.

A greater difficulty, however, emerges when the liberal state encounters non-liberal cultures. Not all such cultures are necessarily against freedom. They may, however, define it and its limits differently. In such cases, Weinstock's liberal state would either exclude them from the political decision-making process, or adopt assimilatory policies. Taylor's argument for a liberal state, on the other hand, is necessarily silent here since it does not hold the distinction between politics and the conceptions of good. This is a point of which, as will be observed shortly, Taylor is aware. MacIntyre's position seems to be more advanced in this respect because of the recognition of traditions of moral enquiry and their different rationalities within multicultural societies. I think it is Taylor's commitment to liberal values which prevents him from formulating a more comprehensive view of cultural diversity which can accommodate cultures which do not hold liberal values equally valuable.

Taylor recognises elsewhere these two models of liberal society: one which is committed to individual rights through a



neutral state without any collective goals beyond personal freedom; and the other which allows the state to commit itself to the survival and flourishing of a particular nation, culture or religion, as long as the basic rights of other citizens with different commitments are protected. The former, which he calls right-based liberalism, insists on uniform application of the rules which define rights and is suspicious of collective goals. It is, therefore, inhospitable to cultural difference. But the latter is based on a collective goal which inevitably requires "some variations in the kinds of law we deem permissible from one cultural context to another".<sup>46</sup> It represents a model of liberal society which is based on the conceptions of the good life held by its members.

But while the second model of liberal society is applicable to cases like Quebec, Taylor admits that it is not the answer to the issue of multiculturalism as debated today. In cases like Quebec the same fundamental rights which are protected by the procedural model of liberalism are not questioned. What both models of liberalism have in common, therefore, is that both are the expressions of the western culture which has inherited certain notions from Christianity. Thus, for instance, both believe in the separation of religion and politics. But a central claim of the proponents of multiculturalism is that as a consequence of their colonial past and multinational migration from other cultures, for instance, there are segments of population in the West whose

---

<sup>46</sup> *ibid.* p.67

cultures have been marginalised (and imposed) by the dominant liberal culture. What is involved in cases like Quebec is whether cultural survival can be acknowledged as a legitimate goal within reasonable bounds (bounds which are both formally and substantially liberal), but not the equal value of different cultures. Thus the main proponents of multiculturalism, Taylor argues, demand recognition of the equal value of different cultures and the acknowledgment of their worth. He suggests that “[a]lthough it is not often stated clearly, the logic behind some of these demands seems to depend upon a premise that we owe equal respect to all cultures”.<sup>47</sup> He goes on to argue that this presumption, however, is not unproblematic because there is no reason to support it. It is a presumption on the basis of which we study other cultures.

But it can't make sense to demand as a matter of right that we come up with a final concluding judgment that their value is great, or equal to others'. That is, if the judgment of value is to register something independent of our own wills and desires, it cannot be dictated by a principle of ethics. On examination, either we will find something of great value in culture C, or we will not. But it makes no more sense to demand that we do so than it does to demand that we find the earth round or flat, the temperature of the air hot or cold.<sup>48</sup>

---

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. p.66.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid. pp.68-69.

Furthermore, moral and political claims for multiculturalism cannot be made on the basis of that kind of subjectivism which leaves no room for value judgment at all. That is to say, its proponents cannot at the same time claim that judgments are not concerned with right or wrong but with liking or disliking. i.e., that judgments are a question of the human will: and criticise judgments which fail to respect the equality of the worth of different cultures. They also cannot appeal to what Taylor calls 'half-baked neo-Nietzschean' theories which argue that all judgments of worth are based on standards that are imposed by the structure of power. because it would shift the demand from respect and recognition to taking sides. The proponents of multiculturalism, therefore. must choose between claiming equal respect and recognition of different cultures on the one hand, and appealing to neo-Nietzschean theories of power which are based on a kind of subjectivism which finds any universal standard of judgment impossible. on the other. Taylor concludes that "there must be something midway between the inauthentic and homogenizing demand for recognition of equal worth, on the one hand, and the self-immurement within ethnocentric standards. on the other" and that "[p]erhaps we don't need to ask whether it's something that others can demand from us as a right. We might simply ask whether this is the way we ought to approach others".<sup>49</sup> But how can it be grounded?

---

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.* c.72.

Taylor's answer is that:

What it requires above all is an admission that we are very far away from that ultimate horizon from which the relative worth of different cultures might be evident. This would mean breaking with an illusion that still holds many "multiculturalists"- as well as their most bitter opponents- in its grip.<sup>50</sup>

While I see myself in agreement with Taylor on his argument against the neo-Nietzschean approach to the problem of multiculturalism because of the inconsistency which follows, there is an important point which he seems to have overlooked. He supposes that behind the claim for the equal recognition of different cultures (as has been argued by multiculturalists) there is, though it may not be spelled out explicitly, a claim for the equal worth of cultures. However, I think not that only not all such demands for recognition are necessarily based on the premise of the equal worth of different cultures, but also that it is not evident that the proponents of multiculturalism actually think so, since an important question which arises here is, if one believes in the equal worth of different cultures, how can one still have any reason for preferring one's own over others'? And if one does not have such a preference, why should one feel committed to a particular culture at all? In fact, the weight a person gives to the conception of the good held within his culture indicates the

---

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, p.73.

importance (or relative superiority) he ascribes to that particular culture and this provides a ground for his preference.

Sometimes such a demand may be based on the claim that judgments of worth often accord to values of a dominant culture which have resulted in the exclusion of other cultures, as Taylor himself mentions. But it need not follow from this that demanding a true judgment of the value of different cultures is necessarily equal to demanding their equal worth. What, then, is valid in the presumption behind multiculturalism? According to Taylor it is "the claim that all human cultures that have animated whole societies over some considerable stretch of time have something important to say to all human beings."<sup>51</sup>

But as Susan Wolf notes in her response to Taylor:

At least one of the serious harms that a failure of recognition perpetuates has little to do with the question of whether the person or the culture who goes unrecognized has anything important to say to all human beings. The need to correct these harms, therefore, does not depend on the presumption or the confirmation of the presumption that a particular culture is distinctively valuable to people outside the culture.<sup>52</sup>

Linda Nicholson also makes two important remarks in this connection. First, she argues that Taylor is not wrong here if he wants to indicate that in contemporary discussions around

---

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.* p.66.

<sup>52</sup> S. Wolf, 'Comment' in *Multiculturalism and 'The Politics of Recognition'* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992), p.79.

multiculturalism a significant element is the demand for recognition of the worth of the contribution of other cultures. In describing the reason for proposed changes around multiculturalism only in terms of such demands, however, he is ignoring some more challenging voices in this debate:

These more challenging voices are not those saying 'recognize my worth' but rather those saying, 'let my presence make you aware of the limitations of what you have so far judged to be true and of worth.'<sup>53</sup>

Nicholson's second point concerns the way the question of the worth of cultures is asked by Taylor:

Taylor frames the topic of multiculturalism as one about how a 'we' should regard claims of previously excluded groups about the worth of their past contributions. But this type of framing make the central question the validity of only certain judgments of worth, i.e., those made by previously excluded groups. It thereby diminishes a focus on the validity of the judgments of worth made by those from socially privileged groups.<sup>54</sup>

Taylor's point, however, indicates an important difficulty in the way of finding a theoretical framework for a politics of multiculturalism, that is, that how it is possible for one to believe in the comparative worth of his own culture and at the same time

---

<sup>53</sup> L. Nicholson, 'To Be or Not To Be: Charles Taylor and the Politics of Recognition', *Constellations* Vol. 3, No. 1, 1996, p.10.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*, p.11.

seek equal recognition. In this respect, while Taylor's discussion certainly serves to underline the existing contradictions in the dominant model of politics, it falls short (as he himself admits) in finding a solution for the problem of multicultural politics in its broader applications.

Furthermore, Taylor's suggestion for multicultural politics is limited to those multicultural societies within which fundamental notions of liberalism to some extent are the agreed yardstick to be used in political decision-making. Even in cases such as Quebec, we are confronted with societies with much in common. No matter to what extent French Quebecois and English Canadians see themselves as inhabitants of different cultures, both have still in common a cultural heritage which distinguishes them from non-western societies. Thus, when it comes to cases where such a shared cultural heritage is absent, we find his theory less useful.

The 'Satanic Verses' affair can be used again as an interesting example in this respect, especially because Taylor himself has shown an interest in it.<sup>55</sup> He argues that the West has developed various patterns of unbelief which represent "forms of human understanding/commitment about ultimate matters like death, the meaning of life, suffering, limitation, evil" and that "[t]hose who believe in them presumably ought to have a right to explore them in all sorts of ways, through philosophy.

---

<sup>55</sup> C. Taylor, 'The Rushdie Controversy', *Public Culture*, Vol. 2, No. 1, Fall 1989.

admonition, imaginative literature.”<sup>56</sup> Hence the basic right of freedom of speech. However, “[a]ny regime of free expression has limits which are justified by the possibility of harm inflicted on others.”<sup>57</sup> Thus libel, for instance, constitutes a kind of moral harm. What makes it a moral harm, however, is not simply a subjective matter. But this is an issue which is sensitive to cultural difference. Taylor goes on to argue that, in similar fashion, there are differences between cultures in regard to how they see the ridiculing of religious belief. There is a difference as to what kind of a sin this may be classed as. However,

[T]here is also a difference as to the intensity of harm it is deemed to inflict on those who endorse this belief- or even whether this is deemed a harm at all. I think it is misguided to claim to identify culture-independent criteria of harm. What people are really doing who propose such criteria is endorsing the superiority of some culture over others. In this case, of course, the superiority of the West.<sup>58</sup>

According to Taylor, “there isn’t a universal definition of freedom of expression, because there isn’t a single world culture.”<sup>59</sup> But this does not mean that he views the culture of western democracies (in his case Canada) as homogeneous since he immediately adds that “[t]he acute problem arises from the fact

---

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p.119.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p.120.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p.120.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p.121.



that international migration is making all societies less culturally uniform. There are large Muslim minorities in 'Christendom'. We are going to need some inspired adhocery in years to come."<sup>60</sup> The question which comes to mind is, in the absence of any such universal criteria of moral harm, how would Taylorian liberalism solve the conflict between the state commitment to protect basic rights (here the freedom of expression) on the one hand and the protection of cultural minorities (here the Muslims) on the other hand?

This difficulty, however, may have its roots somewhere else; for instance, in Amelie O. Rorty's view this is due to Taylor's ambiguous account of culture. Whereas he sometimes broadly refers to culture as a way of life that includes political-economic practices and organisations, his argument requires a narrow usage since his argument on whether a liberal state can legitimately legislate the preservation of its indigenous cultures presupposes a relatively sharp distinction between culture and politics. It is on the grounds of this distinction, Rorty argues, that Taylor suggests that distinctive cultures can share a political-economic system. According to Rorty, in taking Quebecois cultural survival as his primary example, he has made his case easier for himself than it should be. She believes that, as Taylor presents them, the issues over Quebecois recognition have focused almost exclusively on the preservation of a specific

---

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p.121.

language and on the policies and institutions required for- and legitimated by- that preservation. Thus,

With such a simplified and abstracted characterization of the constituents of culture, it is not too difficult to argue that liberalism can, without jeopardizing its primary commitments, extend certain rights of self-preservation to the dominant culture and to subcultures as long as the basic rights of individual citizens remain protected. But when cultures are more fully described, as including economic and political practices and attitudes, the politics of cultural definition becomes entangled in determining public policy on a vast range of substantive issues.<sup>61</sup>

Taylor, of course, acknowledges this point on many occasions. He accepts that his argument for preferring the kind of liberalism which includes conceptions of the good over procedural liberalism which claims neutrality towards such conceptions is valid only for societies the members of which value liberal principles in the first place. Taylor acknowledges that there is a form of the politics of difference which argues that blind liberalisms are themselves the reflections of a particular culture, though he describes it as a very radical claim. Even if perceived as radical, such a claim is not inconsistent with Taylor's own view of morality. In Taylor's terms, the proponents of such a claim may hold different hypergoods, and they may rank moral

---

<sup>61</sup> A. O. Rorty, 'The Hidden Politics of Cultural Identification', *Political Theory*, Vol. 22, No. 1, February 1994, p.157.

values differently. His argument indicates his rather personal preference of liberal principles.

Notice, however, that Taylor's position towards liberalism differs from liberal theories which will be discussed later. The latter are based on the claim for the universal validity of liberalism within the culture of liberal democracies (and in doing so such a culture is viewed as principally homogeneous): for Rawls it is in terms of a purely political liberalism; for Raz it is the superiority of the principle of autonomy as the single liberal good; and for Kymlicka, though considering culture among other primary goods, it is the liberal theory of justice. Taylor, on the other hand, values liberal principles as the conception of the good life which is held within the cultures of certain societies in the West. But for him, other cultures cannot be excluded from politics on the ground of the different values they hold, though he respects liberal principles because he finds them capable of promoting the ideal of authenticity.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Taylor argues for the importance of conceptions of the good life in constituting and shaping the particular identities each of us possesses. Moreover, our identity should be understood as

dialogical which underlines the significance of our communal relationships. The differences between cultural identities depend on the three axes of moral thinking: (i) our relationship with others (rights); (ii) our relationship with ourselves (conceptions of good); and (iii) a range of notions concerned with our dignity. Not only do we live with many goods, but we also rank them through the recognition of higher goods and hypergoods, both of which are culturally dependent since they define the 'moral' in our culture. Visions of the good, therefore, are tied up with our understanding of the self; hence, Taylor's conception of the self and his view of the foundations of political morality.

Taylor argues that modern politics is by its very nature contradictory: the politics of universalism which recognises individuals *qua* human beings, on the one hand, and the politics of difference based on the modern notion of authenticity on the other. The liberal theory of neutrality insists on the former and fails to recognise the latter. Taylor thus argues for another model of liberalism which allows the state to commit itself to the survival and flourishing of a particular culture, nation or religion as long as the basic rights of other citizens are protected.

Since Taylor is more concerned with cases like Quebec where the issues at hand concern two basically close cultures, he fails to see the extent to which non-liberal cultures may suffer from the dominant liberal culture in multicultural societies as it

is the liberal principles which shape the political decision making. For societies which do not hold such shared principles, therefore, Taylor's argument is of little help. The same problem arises in those western societies where there exist cultural communities with cultures different from that of the dominant liberal culture. His theory remains silent in such cases. However, his significant discussion on the notion of individuated identity and claims of equal recognition shows us convincingly that those proponents of multiculturalism who do not respect the liberal culture as valuable cannot appeal to such notions without facing serious inconsistency. We will continue our exploration in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 5

### WALZER: MORALITY, PARTICULARITY AND UNIVERSALITY

Of the three communitarian thinkers who are studied here, Michael Walzer has been most explicitly concerned with political problems. Partly for this reason, in this chapter, which is the last in this part, his view on cultural diversity will be explored. While communitarian in method (i.e. committed to contextualism, insisting on cultural particularity and the good of political community), as mentioned before, his position is closer to liberalism when it comes to the moral values which are to shape the politics of liberal societies. Unlike MacIntyre and Taylor, Walzer is only concerned with the criticism of modernity in so far as it concerns questions of methodology in moral discourse. Thus he is partly interested in finding a more adequate methodology for defending liberal values which appreciates the complexity of modern life, shared understanding of moral goods and their contextual dependence. A good deal of his discussion, therefore, aims to refute universal claims upon liberal moral principles. For Walzer, such principles, as will be seen, should be understood rather as particulars which define the principles viewed as valuable in the culture of liberal societies *here* and

now. It is this aspect of Walzer's discussion which more explicitly concerns the politics of cultural diversity; hence the focus of my study in this chapter. I shall mainly concentrate on four of his books: *Spheres of Justice: A Defense of Pluralism and Equality*, *Interpretation and Social Criticism*, *The Company of Critics* and *Thick and Thin*.<sup>1</sup> In the first section of this chapter, his view on morality and the nature of moral theory will be explored. The second section is concerned with his account of social criticism, so his position is defended against the charge of intolerance. Both sections, therefore, are concerned with his account of political morality. They are also concerned with his conception of the self, since it is there that his argument which views the self as situated in a particular social context and as a culture-producing creature will be explored. The third section concerns his conception of universality and particularity, in particular as argued in *Thick and Thin*, where his view of the foundation of political morality in respect to cultural difference becomes even clearer. In section 4, his view of the politics of cultural diversity will be discussed. Section 5 will provide the concluding remarks on this chapter.

### **1. The Interpretative Character of Moral Discourse**

<sup>1</sup> M. Walzer, *Thick and Thin: Moral Argument at Home and Abroad* (Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994); M. Walzer, *Spheres of Justice: A Defense of Pluralism and Equality* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983); M. Walzer, *Interpretation and Social Criticism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985); M. Walzer, *The Company of Critics: Social Criticism and Political Commitment in the Twentieth Century* (London: Peter Halban, 1988).

It is important to understand Walzer's conception of morality since the politics of cultural diversity is for the most part (if not entirely) concerned with the differences between different accounts of morality.

In his discussion about morality, Walzer distinguishes three common and important approaches to the subject which he calls respectively the path of discovery, the path of invention and the path of interpretation. Within the first we can distinguish two views: first, that in which discovery waits upon revelation. According to this view, the moral world is not only created by God, but also constituted by divine commands. Thus, “[t]he moral world is like a new continent, and the religious leader (God's servant) is like an explorer who brings us the good news of its existence and the first map of its shape”.<sup>2</sup> For Walzer, the problem with this view is that although every revealed morality always stands in sharp contrast to old ideas and practices, “once the revelation is accepted, once the new moral world is inhabited, the critical edge is lost”.<sup>3</sup>

The second view represents what Walzer calls ‘the natural revelation’: “a philosopher who reports to us on the existence of moral law, say, or natural rights or any set of objective moral truths has walked the path of discovery”.<sup>4</sup> It thus can be viewed

---

<sup>2</sup> Walzer, *Interpretation and Social Criticism*, p.4.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p.4.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* p.5



as the secular form of moral revelation. According to this view, the philosopher looks at the world from no particular view and recognises the moral principles that govern the relations of human beings. However, Walzer maintains that it lacks the radical newness and sharp specificity of divine revelation since most often the moral principles delivered to us by the philosopher are already in our possession, incorporated and familiar. Against this view, Walzer points out the particularity of such a philosophical enterprise:

I do not mean to deny the reality of the experience of stepping back, though I doubt that we can ever step back all the way to nowhere. Even when we look at the world from *somewhere else*, however, we are still looking at the world. We are looking, in fact, at a particular world; we may see it with special clarity, but we will not discover anything that isn't already there. Since the particular world is also our own world, we will not discover anything that isn't already here.<sup>5</sup>

The second path of morality is that of invention. Philosophers who either think that there is no actually existing moral world or that this actually existing moral world is inadequate, undertake the project of constructing a morality which can govern man's relationships with others. The end is given by the morality that is hoped to be invented: a common life where justice or political virtue, or goodness, or basic values like

---

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, p.7.

these would be realised. According to this approach to morality, the philosopher is to design the moral world because there is no pre-existent (divine or natural) design. Philosophers, therefore, need a discourse on method for moral philosophy, i.e. a design of a design procedure the crucial requirement of which is that it eventuates in agreement. An outstanding contemporary example of this approach, as will be observed in chapter 7, is John Rawls whose argument about the 'original position' and the 'veil of ignorance' in *Theory of Justice* are meant to pave the way for such a universal agreement. "The point of an invented morality", Walzer argues, "is to provide what God and nature do not provide, a universal corrective for all the different social moralities".<sup>6</sup> He mentions then that despite the ambitious claims of this approach, it is not clear why newly invented principles should govern the lives of people who already share a moral culture and speak a natural language?<sup>7</sup>

The third approach is that of interpretation, the one which Walzer believes as accords best with everyday experience of morality:

The idealized morality is in origin a social morality; it is neither divine nor natural, except insofar as we believe that 'the voice of the people is the voice of God' or that human nature requires us to live in society- and neither of these views commits us to approve of everything the people say or of every

---

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* p.13.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* p.14.

social arrangement.<sup>8</sup>

The project of modelling or idealizing an existing morality does depend, however, upon some prior acknowledgment of the value of that morality: "Perhaps its value is simply this: that there is no other starting point for moral speculation. We have to start from where we are. Where we are, however, is always *someplace of value*, else we would never have settled there."<sup>9</sup>

Walzer argues then that such an argument is equally important for philosophers of invention (at least in a minimalist version like Rawls's). Its importance, however, is conceded by philosophers of invention who appeal to intuitions either in constructing or in testing their models and ideal types, since intuition is a pre-reflective and pre-philosophic knowledge of the moral world. Thus, the claim of interpretation is that "neither discovery nor invention is necessary because we already possess what they pretend to provide. Morality, unlike politics, does not require executive authority or systematic legislation. We do not have to discover the moral world because we have always lived there. We do not have to invent it because it has already been invented- though not in accordance with any philosophical method".<sup>10</sup>

Now while the source of the authority of the morality which is discovered is God or objective truth; and that of invention is

---

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p.17.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p.17.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, pp.19-20.

that anyone who adopts the proper designed procedure would invent it; the authority of interpretation of the existing morality derives from the fact that the morality we discover and invent always turns out remarkably similar to the morality we have. Moreover, it is authoritative for us "because it is only by virtue of its existence that we exist as the moral beings we are".<sup>11</sup> The question of morality is not, therefore, what the right thing to do is, but "what is the right thing *for us* to do?"<sup>12</sup> Hence the particularity of morality. But to what extent is it particular? Walzer answers this question through comparing morality and law. In his view, morality is commonly put in more general terms than law because the former provides the basic prohibitions which the latter specifies. Such prohibitions constitute a kind of minimal and universal moral code. But as Walzer points out, "[b]y themselves, though, these universal prohibitions barely begin to determine the shape of a fully developed or livable morality. They provide a framework for any possible (moral) life, but only a framework, with all the substantive details still to be filled in before anyone could actually live in one way rather than another".<sup>13</sup> What makes them a moral culture is continuous conversations which result in a thickened understanding. Notice that this account of the relationship of universal minimal moral code and morality as broadly understood is like those which have

---

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. p.21.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. p.23.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. p.25.

been discussed by MacIntyre and Taylor (studied in the last two chapters) and is very central to Walzer's proposed politics of cultural difference which will be discussed in the last section of the present chapter.

Another question which comes to mind is whether better interpretations can be recognised without the help of a correct moral theory. In order to answer this question, Walzer takes Rawls's difference principle as an example and argues that "we are driven to interpretation because we already disagree about the meaning of what purports to be, or what some readers take to be, a correct moral theory. There is no definitive way of ending the disagreement. But the best account of the difference principle would be one that rendered it coherent with other American values".<sup>14</sup> He concludes then that morality is:

[S]omething we have to argue about. The argument implies common possession, but common possession does not imply agreement. There is a tradition, a body of moral knowledge; and there is this group of sages, arguing. There isn't anything else. No discovery or invention can end the argument; no "proof" takes precedence over the (temporary) majority of sages.<sup>15</sup>

But this gives rise to a third question: does interpretation bind us irrevocably to the *status quo*? In order to understand Walzer's reply we need to turn to the next section which concerns

---

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p.28.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p.32.

his view on social criticism. Before that, however, it would be helpful to pursue a little further his interpretative approach to moral issues. To do so, I have chosen Walzer's discussion on distributive justice as an example. There he argues that first, there is no single point of access to the world of different distributive arrangements and ideologies. Secondly, there has never been either a single decision point from which all distributions are controlled or a single set of agents making decisions. And thirdly, there has never been a single criterion, or a single set of interconnected criteria, for all distributions. "[T]o search for unity", therefore, "is to misunderstand the subject matter of distributive justice".<sup>16</sup> Thus:

I want to argue... that the principles of justice are themselves pluralistic in form; that different social goods ought to be distributed for different reasons, in accordance with different procedures, by different agents; and that all these differences derive from different understandings of the social goods themselves- the inevitable product of historical and cultural particularism.<sup>17</sup>

To limit the pluralism of distributive justice, requires a theory of goods.

I do not think that we need go further. What is quoted above sufficiently illuminates Walzer's conception of morality and moral discourse. This way of thinking about social justice.

---

<sup>16</sup>Walzer, *Spheres of Justice*, p.4.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p.6.

however, has not been unchallenged and some such criticisms have important implications for Walzer's understanding of cultural diversity and its relevant politics, to which I shall return in section 4. It is time now to turn to his discussion on social criticism.

## **2. Social Criticism**

As I mentioned in chapter 2, a criticism which is usually raised against moral discourse conceived as interpretation is that because we are to interpret what already exists, it does not have any significant critical force, and, therefore, binds us to the *status quo*. According to the opponents of the interpretative approach to morality, the necessary prerequisite of social criticism is the critical distance so the recognition and acknowledgment of the wrongs become possible. But the crucial question, as Walzer argues, concerns the nature of such a distance. The conventional view is that the critic has to stand outside the common circumstances of collective life since what makes criticism possible is radical detachment. Accordingly, such a detachment should be understood in two senses: the critic must be emotionally detached, i.e. disinterested and dispassionate. And, he must be intellectually detached, i.e. open-minded and objective. Against this view, Walzer argues that

“[t]his view of the critic gains strength from the fact that it matches closely the conditions of philosophical discovery and invention and so seems to suggest that only discoverers and inventors, or men and women armed by discoverers and inventors, can be properly critical”.<sup>18</sup>

But radical detachment, Walzer points out, is not a prerequisite of social criticism or even of radical social criticism since throughout the history, most critics have not been so. Arguments for radical detachment indicate rather a confusion between detachment and marginality: “Marginality has often been a condition that motivates criticism and determines the critic's characteristic tone and appearance. It is not, however, a condition that makes for disinterest, dispassion, open-mindedness, or objectivity”.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, the critic is one of us:

Perhaps he has traveled and studied abroad, but his appeal is to local or localized principles: if he has picked up new ideas on his travel, he tries to connect them to the local culture, building his own intimate knowledge: he is not intellectually detached. Nor is he emotionally detached; he does not wish the natives well, he seeks the success of their common enterprise.<sup>20</sup>

According to Walzer, an outsider can become a social critic only if he manages to get himself inside so he can enter imaginatively

---

<sup>18</sup> Walzer, *Interpretation and Social Criticism*, p.36.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* p.37.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.* p.39.



into local practices and arrangements. Unlike the conventional view, this alternative description fits the majority of social critics.

However, it gives rise to two important questions: first, are there standards available to the social critic that are internal to the practices of his own society and at the same time critical? And second, do the connections of the critic leave room enough for critical distance? Walzer's answer to the first question is that social criticism should be understood as one of the more important by-products of the larger activity of cultural elaboration and affirmation. If we adopt this definition, priests and prophets, historians, teachers and sages, poets and writers generally, are social critics. They are not a new class or carriers of an adversary culture. They carry the common culture and do, among other things, their intellectual work.

His answer to the second question is that “[c]riticism does not require us to step back from society as a whole but only to step away from certain sorts of power relationships within society. It is not connection but authority and domination from which we must distance ourselves”.<sup>21</sup> Hence “[a] little to the side, but not outside: critical distance is measured in inches”.<sup>22</sup> Even when he looks at his own society with a fresh and sceptical eye, the critic is not a detached observer or enemy because his criticism does not require detachment or enmity: “[H]e finds a

---

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, p.60.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, p.61.

warrant for critical engagement in the idealism, even if it is a hypocritical idealism, of the actually existing moral world".<sup>23</sup>

Walzer also denies the novelty of characteristics like self-consciousness, opposition and alienation by reference to which contemporary social critics distinguish themselves as such: "Contemporary social critics, ..., are not peculiarly self-conscious; they are not peculiarly hostile to the societies in which they live; they are not peculiarly alienated from those societies. We can best describe them as the most recent members, no doubt with their own rites and symbols, of the Ancient and Honorable Company of Social Critics".<sup>24</sup>

Of course, the social critic cannot expect any definite answer to the problems he poses; it is a continuous argument. But "[i]t is better to tell stories- better even though there is no definitive and best story, better even though there is no last story that, once told, would leave all future storytellers without employment".<sup>25</sup>

### **3. Universals and Particulars of Morality**

We saw above that although Walzer denies that any morality can be universally valid, and that interpretation is the approach we take in studying what is best for us as members of particular communities, he admits that there is a minimalist moral code

---

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* p. 61.

<sup>24</sup> Walzer, *The Company of Critics*, p.8.

<sup>25</sup> Walzer, *Interpretation and Social Criticism*, p.65.

acceptable to all human beings as such. The shortcoming of this minimalist moral code, however, is its inability to provide the moral principles to which we need to appeal in moral and political discourse.

In *Thick and Thin* Walzer offers a more developed version of his account of universality and particularity in moral discourse and then applies it to international relations which together provides one of the most elaborated argument of this kind. I shall explain his view on thick and thin morality together with an illustrative example (again on social justice) here, and then, in the next section, we will see how it works in international relations, and what it implies for the politics of cultural diversity.

According to Walzer, “[m]oral terms have minimal and maximal meanings; we can standardly give thin and thick accounts of them, and the two accounts are appropriate to different contexts, serve different purposes”.<sup>26</sup> But these two are not distinct. Rather, the former are embedded in the latter. “expressed in the same idiom, sharing the same (historical/cultural/religious/political) orientation”.<sup>27</sup> Thus the contemporary debate on relativism and universalism is best understood as an argument about the legitimacy and extent of these two resonances.

The novelty of Walzer's recent book, however, is that unlike

---

<sup>26</sup> Walzer, *Thick and Thin*, p.2.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* p.3.

the claim of most philosophers who describe such dualism in terms of a thin set of universal principles adapted thickly to these or those historical circumstances, or as he himself had put it in his previous works, a core morality differently elaborated in different cultures, here he argues that while the latter is better since it suggests a less circumstantial and constrained process, “both these descriptions suggest mistakenly that the starting point for the development of morality is the same in every case”.<sup>28</sup> Rather, “[m]orality is thick from the beginning, culturally integrated, fully resonant, and it reveals itself thinly only on special occasions, when moral language is turned to specific purposes”.<sup>29</sup> Thus while it is usually thought that minimalism in morality means that the minimal moral rule serves no particular interest and expresses no particular culture and, therefore, regulates everyone's behaviour in a universally correct way. “minimalism is neither objective nor inexpressive. The thick character of morality is reiteratively particularist and locally significant, intimately bound up with the maximal moralities created here and here and here, in specific times and places”<sup>30</sup> whereas the thin character explains why we march vicariously with people in trouble, whoever they are, while we have our own parade. It fits “the necessary character of any human society: universal because it is human, particular because it is a

---

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. p.4

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. p.4.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. p.7

society”.<sup>31</sup> Therefore:

Minimalism makes for a certain limited, though important and heartening, solidarity. It doesn't make for a full-blooded universal doctrine. So we march for a while together, and then we return to our own parades. The idea of a moral minimum plays a part in each of these moments, not only in the first. It explains how it is that we come together; it warrants our separation. By its very thinness, it justifies us in returning to the thickness that is our own.<sup>32</sup>

Thus, the morality in which the moral minimum is embedded, and from which it can only temporarily be abstracted, is the only full-blooded morality we can ever have.

Walzer's account, however, should be distinguished from the contemporary version of moral minimalism according to which minimalism supplies the generative rules of different moral maximums. On this latter view, minimal morality governs the procedure of moral discourse, i.e. it consists in the rules of engagement that bind all the speakers, whereas maximalism is the never-finished outcome of their arguments. But as Walzer argues, this doctrine faces two difficulties: The first is that the minimum turns out to be rather more than minimal. “The thin morality”, he points out, “is already very thick- with an entirely decent liberal or social democratic thickness”.<sup>33</sup> The second difficulty is that the rules of engagement assume that in the beginning there are

---

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, p.8.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, p.11.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, p.12.

rules and then there are engagements: “Minimalism precedes maximalism; once we were thin but have gone thick”.<sup>34</sup> Walzer seems to be right, then, to argue that “the minimal morality prescribed by these theories is simply abstracted from, and not very far from, contemporary democratic culture. If no such culture existed, this particular version of minimal morality would not even be plausible to us”.<sup>35</sup>

Walzer maintains, however, that while minimal morality is very important for criticism and solidarity, it cannot substitute for or replace the defence of thickly conceived values. The reason lies in the nature of minimal morality since it is the product of mutual recognition among protagonists of different fully developed moral cultures: “It consists in principles and rules that are reiterated in different times and places, and that are seen to be similar even though they are expressed in different idioms and reflect different histories and different versions of the world.”<sup>36</sup>

We saw in the previous chapter that Taylor argues that the demand for equal recognition of different cultures cannot suggest the equality of their worth. One may ask whether Walzer’s account would face the same difficulty. Walzer anticipates such an objection and thus stresses that “what is recognized is just this (partial) commonality, not the full moral significance of the other

---

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, p.13.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, p.13.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, p.17.

cultures.”<sup>37</sup>

When this account of minimal and maximal moralities is applied to distributive justice, for instance, “any full account of how social goods ought to be distributed will display the features of moral maximalism: it will be idiomatic in its language, particularist in its cultural reference, and circumstantial in the two senses of that word: historically dependent and factually detailed.”<sup>38</sup> There is no overall hierarchy of goods. There are no universal principles according to which they should be distributed. Distributive justice is by its very nature a subject of thick morality. I am not going to present Walzer's discussion on justice at any length here. But it is important to point out that, for Walzer, every maximalism stands in an intimate descriptive/critical relation with its own society. For what it expresses in its idiomatic, particularist, and circumstantial style is the socially constructed idealism of certain people. It describes the things they make and value and distribute among themselves and the personal qualities that they cultivate and mean to respect, even if they most often fail to respect them, in the course of the distribution. Minimalism, by contrast, works with an elementary and undifferentiated understanding of society and self, abstracted from all the actual and elaborated understandings.<sup>39</sup>

---

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, p.17.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, p.21.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, p.39.

Accordingly, a minimalist view is a view from a distance or a view in a crisis, so that we can recognise injustice only in the large. We can see and condemn certain sorts of boundary crossings, gross invasions of the domestic sphere, for example, like the appearance of the secret police in the middle of the night. However, "we won't have much to say about the precise boundaries of the home and the family or the character of legitimate action within the kinship system (or anywhere else). Minimalism gives us no access to the range of social meanings or that specific forms of distributive complexity. We can deal justly, as agents of distribution and as critics-in-detail, only from the inside of maximal morality."<sup>40</sup>

Although minimal morality is unable to provide a theory of essentially thick subjects like distributive justice, it can be properly applied to international relations in order to provide a better understanding of the nature of the politics of cultural diversity: a subject which will be discussed in the next section.

#### **4. Minimal Politics of Cultural Diversity**

While the diversity of (particularly incommensurable and untranslatable) cultures is an obstacle for establishing any universally acceptable thick morality, in order to work out a minimal morality which is adaptable to different cultural

---

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. p.39.



communities, to find a universal principle is necessary. The crucial question is what that principle or set of principles is. Walzer argues that the principle of self-determination is the one which can be thought of the expression of moral minimalism in international relations. This principle derives from a basic right based on the relations of the members of cultural communities and their communities: "*They ought to be allowed to govern themselves* (in accordance with their own political ideas)-insofar as they can decently do that, given their local entanglements."<sup>41</sup> Walzer immediately adds that "[t]he principle of self-determination is subject to interpretation and amendment" and that this would not necessarily result in a noisy, incoherent, unstable and deadly politics as a consequence of endless separations because "[h]istory reveals many ways, versions, and models, and so it suggests the existence of many more or less secure stopping points along the slippery slope."<sup>42</sup>

He goes on to argue then that "[t]he just treatment of national minorities depends on two sets of distinctions: first, between territorially concentrated and dispersed minorities; and, second, between minorities radically different from and those that are only marginally different from the majority population".<sup>43</sup> Accordingly, such solutions differ from one case to another. For instance, the best practical solution for the first

---

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p.68.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p.70.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p.73.

group of the first distinction may be some version of local autonomy (as for the Albanians in Kosova), whereas what the second group ask for is limited claims on the state such as genuinely equal citizenship and the freedom to express their differences in voluntary associations of civil society (as for religious Amish in Pennsylvania).

It can be argued that to adopt this method would give rise to dangerous tyrants who aim above all to triumph over their neighbours and enemies. Walzer's response is that "these people will not rule in their own tribes if we can make it possible for their fellow-tribesmen to live 'at ease within modest bounds'".<sup>44</sup> He suggests that this is the equivalent of toleration in politics: "Every tribe within its own modest bounds: this the political equivalent of toleration for every church and sect. What makes it possible- though still politically difficult and uncertain- is that the bounds need not enclose, in every case, the same sort of space".<sup>45</sup> Thus "[s]ecession, border revision, federation, regional or functional autonomy, cultural pluralism: there are many designs for 'a room of one's own', many political possibilities, and no reason to think that the choice of one of these in this or that case makes a similar choice necessary in all the other cases."<sup>46</sup> In other words, "[w]e need to think about the political

---

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p.79.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p.79.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p.80.

structures best suited to this multiplication and division".<sup>47</sup> It should be remembered, however, that "[t]ribalism names the commitment of individuals and groups to their own history, culture, and identity, and this commitment (though not any particular version of it) is a permanent feature of human social life."<sup>48</sup>

It can be asked, however, how far this argument of the principle of self-determination is helpful in establishing what is claimed to be a universally acceptable minimal morality. It is not difficult to see that the conditional definition which is given here is of little help in practice. We can imagine two or more cultural communities, each with a claim on autonomy, each claiming to govern its members decently in accordance with its own interpretation, participating in endless discussions. Any minimal moral principle, it can be pointed out, needs to accord a universally acceptable criterion or set of criteria upon which different cultures would agree. But that is exactly what Walzer's proposed principle of self-determination lacks. The same objection may be made against his proposed political equivalent of toleration since the demand for living 'at ease within modest bounds' does not provide any such criterion.

My second point about Walzer's argument concerns his two sets of distinctions mentioned in his proposed just treatment of

---

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p.82.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.* p.81.

national minorities. I do not wish to deny any significance for the first distinction according to which territorially concentrated and dispersed national minorities are distinguished. But I believe that it is the second distinction, i.e. the distinction between minorities radically different from and those that are only marginally different from the majority population, which is of most importance. Its importance, as I have mentioned briefly in previous chapters, lies for the most part in underlining the extent to which cultural communities are different in their moralities. It seems to me that while the first distinction may be followed by endless debates framed in geographical and historical terms, the recognition of the difference between moralities provides a yardstick by using which a politics of cultural difference can be designed.

Walzer is correct, however, in arguing that there is no such thing as a certain political structure, but rather, a variety of political structures best suited to the existing multiplication and division. It would be more appropriate, therefore, that when the politics of cultural diversity is concerned, one talks of a possible framework, rather than definite solutions.

However, while Walzer's argument about thick and thin morality may plausibly be used for a theory of the politics of cultural diversity, a question which comes to mind is whether it is consistent with his other arguments and in particular with his

positive attitude towards liberal values. This is the question which I would like to pursue a little further here.

As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, while communitarian in method, Walzer does not oppose values which are at the heart of liberal morality. Through his communitarian criticism, therefore, he seeks a more plausible defence of liberalism by elaborating a different epistemology for it. Thus, liberal notions like equality and rights, for instance, are viewed as significantly valuable by him as well. As a result, in his comment on Taylor's 'The Politics of Recognition' Walzer maintains that of the two types of liberalism described by Taylor, i.e. equal rights liberalism and the liberalism of cultural survival, he would choose the former from within the latter: "that means that the choice is not governed by an absolute commitment to state neutrality and individual rights nor by the deep dislike of particularist identities (short of citizenship) that is common among liberals of the first sort".<sup>49</sup> The reason for this preference is that Walzer thinks that immigrants to western societies have already made their choice to take the cultural risk when they come here and leave the certainties of their old way of life behind. But he would opt for "liberalism 1- here, not everywhere".<sup>50</sup> But is this a correct account of what is actually happening to immigrants in such multicultural societies? I leave this question aside for the moment

---

<sup>49</sup> M. Walzer, 'Comment' in A. Gutmann (ed.), *Multiculturalism and 'The Politics of Recognition'* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), pp.102-103.

<sup>50</sup> *ibid.* p.103.

since I think we need to see first which aspects of liberalism it is that Walzer values. I have chosen one of his arguments about liberalism, the implications of which concerns my purpose here. In a paper called 'Liberalism and the Art of Separation', Walzer argues that contrary to the criticism of the Left, "[t]he art of separation is not an illusory or fantastic enterprise; it is a morally and politically necessary adaptation to the complexities of modern life. Liberal theory reflects and reinforces a long-term process of social differentiation."<sup>51</sup> For Walzer, the significance of this separation is that under its aegis, liberty and equality go together. As a result, "we can say that a (modern, complex, and differentiated) society enjoys both freedom and equality when success in one institutional setting isn't convertible into success in another, that is, when the separation holds, when political power doesn't shape the church or religious zeal the state, and so on."<sup>52</sup>

Such a notion of the separation of spheres is also applied by Walzer where he is concerned with cultural diversity and ethnic minority rights. In his essay called 'Pluralism in Political Perspective', he argues that pluralism in the strong sense- one state, many people- is usually possible only under tyrannical regimes, except in the United States where pluralism originated in

---

<sup>51</sup> M. Walzer, 'Liberalism and the Art of Separation', *Political Theory*, Vol. 12, No.3, August 1984, p.319

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p.321.

individual and familial migration'<sup>53</sup>. The United States was not an empire and, therefore, nationality and ethnicity never acquired a stable territorial base. Thus, "the immigrants (except for the black slaves) had come voluntarily and did not have to be forced to stay... nor did groups of immigrants have any basis for or any reason for secession."<sup>54</sup> Then he goes on to assess the functions of American ethnic self-assertion. According to Walzer, some have defended ethnicity against cultural naturalisation. Others approach the problem in a more positive sense of celebrating this or that culture. It has a general and particular form: the celebration of diversity itself and then of the history and culture of a particular group. Walzer points out that. "[t]he first of these, it should be stressed, would be meaningless without the second, for the first is abstract and the second concrete. Pluralism has in itself no power of survival; it depends upon energy, enthusiasm, commitment within the component groups: it cannot outlast the particularity of cultures and creeds."<sup>55</sup> The third function is to build and sustain the reborn community in terms of creating institutions, gaining control of resources, and providing educational and welfare services.

Walzer then argues that whereas some (following Rousseau) would argue that ethnic pluralism is entirely compatible with the

---

<sup>53</sup> M. Walzer, 'Pluralism in Political Perspective' in M. Walzer (ed.), *The Politics of Ethnicity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982).

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.* p.7.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.* p.15.

existence of a unified republic, such an identification is an unlikely description of the American republic where both ethnic culture and religious belief have been firmly relegated to the private sphere.<sup>56</sup> Accordingly, “[i]t is not implausible to imagine a heterogeneous but egalitarian society: the heterogeneity, cultural and private; the equality, economic and political.”<sup>57</sup> This view of the separation of spheres, as has frequently been shown in this chapter, plays an important role in Walzer’s understanding of the politics of cultural diversity (at least in the United States). It is on the basis of this belief that he equates the state-ethnic distinction with the well-known state-church distinction.<sup>58</sup> Thus, in his view, state commitment to pluralism would not lead to anything more than providing group organisation and cultural expression opportunities available. It cannot, therefore, be required to ensure that such opportunities are used. He concludes:

The primary function of the state, and of politics generally, is to do justice to individuals, and in a pluralist society ethnicity is simply one of the background conditions of this effort. Ethnic identification gives meaning to the lives of many men and women, but it has nothing to do with their standing as citizens.<sup>59</sup>

Although, to some extent, some changes in Walzer’s recent

---

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p.17.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p.23.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p.26.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p.28.



writings under this topic can be observed. the same hostile attitude towards the ethnic revival as expressed (implicitly and explicitly) in the above mentioned essay can still be recognised. Thus, while the certainty behind the arguments, for instance, has been replaced by casting doubts over uniform actions by the state in respect of such differences, he still finds it difficult to recognise any substantial claim for particular rights (e.g. independence or self-rule) for cultural minorities. Some such uncertainties were mentioned when the relevant themes of *Thick and Thin* were explored above. The same uncertainty is reflected in his discussion in 'Notes on the new tribalism'.<sup>60</sup> He argues there that the independence of Native Americans and Maoris in New Zealand as the victims of conquest or oppression in the past is eroded with time, "not because the wrong done to them is wiped out... but because the possibility no longer exists of the restoration of anything remotely resembling their former independence."<sup>61</sup> Thus, although something more than equal citizenship is due to them, "[t]hey cannot claim absolute protection against the pressure and attractions of the common life- as if they were an endangered species."<sup>62</sup> Walzer believes that majorities have no obligation to guarantee the survival of minority culture<sup>63</sup> so at this point he clearly distinguishes himself

---

<sup>60</sup> M. Walzer, 'Notes on the new tribalism' in C. Brown (ed.), *Political reconstructing in Europe* (London: Routledge, 1994) .

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p.192.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p.193.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p.194.

from Taylor who, as seen in the previous chapter, argues for the survival of minority cultures as an obligation of liberal states. An important question which comes to mind is, if Walzer acknowledges the cultural particularity of human societies, why does he not recognise extensive cultural differences within western democracies and in particular the United States?

The answer lies mostly in his idea of complex equality which, as David Miller rightly points out, although it does not serve as a fundamental principle in the way in which equality, or desert, or inalienable rights have served in other theories, is understood as an ethical by-product which appears in liberal societies when the autonomy of each distributive sphere is maintained.<sup>64</sup> Such a complex equality is to be understood in two senses: first, as something obtained when advantages in one sphere cannot be converted to another; secondly, in terms of equal citizenship. In both ways it concerns cultural differences within such societies. In the first sense, culture is to be understood as separated from politics, hence Walzer's equation of the church-state distinction with the culture-state distinction. In the second sense, equal citizenship, which is at the heart of the supposedly shared liberal culture, rules out any significant status to cultural minorities in politics. Walzer holds that the locus of cultural shared understandings of social goods is the political

---

<sup>64</sup> D. Miller, 'Introduction' in D. Miller and M. Walzer (eds.), *Pluralism, Justice, and Equality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p.3.

community, which in case of the United States means the accordance of cultural community to the national political community.<sup>65</sup> What he fails to see is that it is exactly the existence of such a shared culture within liberal societies which has been widely questioned by the proponents of multiculturalism, including cultural minorities. Such a failure may be due to his attachment to an anthropological concept of culture which may have led him to view culture as a distinct sphere among other spheres.<sup>66</sup> By the same token, he views religious differences as matters which have more to do with memory and feeling than with any objective measure of dissimilarity.<sup>67</sup>

Another possible source of such an attitude towards cultural differences could be the fact that although he argues for a way of doing philosophy as interpreting to one's fellow citizens the world of meaning that they share, he himself fails to appeal to such shared understanding in his own discussions. Joseph Carens has mentioned two examples from Walzer's writing in this respect: The first is where Walzer says that it is wrong for new states formed after the demise of colonialism to expel current inhabitants who do not share the race or ethnicity of the newly established dominant majority.<sup>68</sup> As Carens points out, "[t]he sort of case he has in mind presumably is the expulsion of Asians from

---

<sup>65</sup> Walzer, *Spheres of Justice*, p.28.

<sup>66</sup> The influence of Walzer's anthropological colleagues has been suggested by M. Rustin in 'Equality in Post-Modern Times' in *Pluralism, Justice, and Equality*, p.20n.

<sup>67</sup> Walzer, *Notes on the new tribalism*, p.195.

<sup>68</sup> Walzer, *Spheres of Justice*, pp.42-43.

Kenya and Uganda in the 1970s. But he makes no appeal to African or even Asian understandings of community and of responsibilities towards those seen in some way as outsiders. Instead, he cites Hobbes.”<sup>69</sup> The second example is Walzer’s criticism of the treatment of ‘guest workers’ in Western Europe which argues that people who live and work in a country should also be given access to citizenship.<sup>70</sup> As Carens notices, “[t]he German exclusion of Turks from citizenship is perhaps the clearest example of the sort of practice Walzer is criticising, but he says nothing about German or Turkish history, culture, traditions, or conceptions of membership and community. Instead, he offers an argument based on general, even abstract, liberal democratic principles.”<sup>71</sup> One could add another example, i.e. his criticism of the Islamic Republic in Iran in his Response to Carens<sup>72</sup>, which is not only ill-informed and inconsistent, but is again based on a liberal interpretation. For instance, he talks about a possible “long story of clerical corruption” within the Islamic community itself. He presumably thinks of Muslim *Ulama* as Christian clergies, just as he equates mosque with church when he says that in contemporary Iran “there is no separation of mosque and state”.<sup>73</sup> For anyone with a knowledge of Islam,

---

<sup>69</sup> J. Carens, ‘Complex Justice, Culture, and Politics’ in *Pluralism, Justice, and Equality*, pp.49-50.

<sup>70</sup> Walzer, *Spheres of Justice*, pp.56-60.

<sup>71</sup> Cit. opt., p.50.

<sup>72</sup> Walzer, ‘Response’ in *Pluralism, Justice, and Equality*, pp.288-290.

<sup>73</sup> *ibid.*, p.288.

however, such analogies are simply mistaken.<sup>74</sup> While the church is a social institution and an organisation which is considered as the agent of Christianity, mosques are simply places where Muslims gather for their daily prayers, something more like chaplaincies. And whereas Christian clergymen are known as members of the priesthood who are allowed to perform religious services, the term *Ulama* (which is the plural of *A'alim* which means knowledgeable in Islam) simply refers to those who have studied Islamic theology and law and are chosen by local people in every region to lead *Jama'ah* (collective worship), without any other particular authority. Here again, Walzer fails to make any reference to interpretations from within the Islamic culture, and therefore, presents an argument which is irrelevant.

All these examples, however, concern morality and politics abroad. More important is Walzer's failure to recognise cultural difference at home, i.e. America. Is it really the case that there is such a thing as *the American culture* which works as a melting pot and, therefore, the separation of politics and religious or culture can be viewed as a distinction on which all Americans agree? Or is the fact, that since the spheres of social goods are subject to different interpretations, the boundaries between them are drawn differently in accordance with different views? Walzer's position in this respect is open to at least four

---

<sup>74</sup> Cf. A. Blacks, 'Classical Islam and Medieval Europe: A Comparison of Political Philosophies and Cultures', *Political Studies*, Vol.XLI, No. 1, March 1993.

criticisms.

First, as Michael Rustin point out, although Walzer expects that the logic of every sphere of justice enables the members of society to define the appropriate boundaries between the spheres, this seems to assume far too much because “[a]ll that such concepts usually identify is that *some* limit or boundary is appropriate, not what this limit should be, or what the jurisdiction of one sphere should be relative to others.”<sup>75</sup>

The second objection concerns the distinctions between the spheres. By considering American culture as somehow heterogeneous, it is assumed that there is a consensus among Americans on such boundaries. However, religious communities within that society may have an entirely different view on this matter and, as Rustin mentions, “may decline to recognize such boundaries as legitimate at all.”<sup>76</sup>

Third, suppose that in Walzer’s view such religious beliefs are mostly held among immigrants who, as he assumes, have already accepted the American culture since they have come voluntarily. Would feminists, for instance, who neither fit in the category of geographically concentrated minorities nor can be considered as voluntary immigrants, agree on defining the sphere of political power as narrowly as most liberals define it? As Carole Pateman argues, “feminist criticism is primarily directed at the

---

<sup>75</sup> M. Rustin, ‘Equality in Post-modern Times’, p.30.

<sup>76</sup> *ibid.*, p.29.

separation and opposition between the public and private spheres in liberal theory and practice.”<sup>77</sup>

Fourth, in case of immigration, as W. Kymlicka argues, although Walzer is right about the need for an admissions policy, his commitment to cultural relativism would not show whose understandings should be authoritative in making these decisions. Kymlicka continues, “[o]n Walzer’s scheme, minorities only have claims if they are sufficiently large in number and geographically concentrated to be a viable economic state (as Canadian Indians and Inuit aren’t), or if they have sufficient economic or political clout to make common citizenship impossible and thereby force mutual accommodation instead. These are morally arbitrary factors. It can’t be right that a minority only has the right to protect itself if it has the power to fend off the assimilationist drive of the majority’s ‘historical tradition’ of nationalizing culture.”<sup>78</sup>

In spite of Walzer’s insistence, that at least in contemporary United States, cultural community corresponds to political community (by which he implies the nation-state) and, as a result, all Americans can come to a point of agreement on the contents and limits of the spheres of social life, as these criticisms indicate, the existence of such a shared culture is far

---

<sup>77</sup> C. Pateman, ‘Feminist Critiques of the Public/Private Dichotomy’ in S. Benn & G. Gaus (eds.), *Private and Public in Social Life* (London: Croom Helm, 1983), p.281. For liberal views on this subject see for example S. Hampshire ‘Public and Private Morality’ in S. Hampshire (ed.), *Public and Private Morality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978).

<sup>78</sup> W. Kymlicka, *Liberalism, Community and Culture* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p.228.

less evident than he implies. In Walzer's view, injustice appears when these separated spheres of life are not kept separated. He therefore calls for the protection of institutional integrity. Hence the aim of his project in his *Spheres of Justice*. To pursue Walzer's portrait of social justice as the protection of institutional integrity in further detail is not relevant here. What matters is how far it is consistent with his support of cultural diversity as presented in *Thick and Thin*. On the one hand, he admits the incommensurability of many cultures as the result of the thick moralities they hold. On the other hand, as observed above, he supports a kind of liberalism which regards rights as the basis of its policy making. These two, however, are not always consistent, even in western liberal societies where Walzer thinks his favourite liberalism can be applied. since most of them are multicultural and many of them consist of controversial cultures. Since some of these controversial cultures do not hold the distinctions which he finds valuable, the application of his theory of justice in terms of protecting institutional integrity falls within the limits of the liberal cultural community. Walzer is right to view his thick and thin morality theory as the correct articulation of our world's realities, but he fails to realise that it is not only true in international relations but also within most (if not all) liberal democracies (including the United States). It is here that I think his position is inconsistent. However, this is not to say that



such an inconsistency undermines the significance of his distinction between thick and thin morality *per se*. Rather, it implies that it should be located not only at the international level, but, in most cases at least, at the national level too. In fact, it provides a unique understanding of the problem of the politics of cultural diversity, a point which I shall pursue a little further below.

In order to do so, I would like to return at this point to Walzer's discussion of immigrants which I left aside above, since I think a closer look at it would reveal a fundamental problem which underlies all his discussions on cultural difference: his problematic conception of culture. As we saw, Walzer argues that immigrants to western societies have already made their choice to take the cultural risk when they come voluntarily here and leave the certainties of their old way of life behind. I do not think that this description captures the reality. To begin with, not all who migrated to the United States did so *voluntarily*, if presumably involuntary immigration is understood by Walzer only in terms of being forced for political reasons. How adequate is it to talk about free choice for those who migrate to the United States in order to escape the hopeless poverty of their homelands (which is sometimes the result of injustice in South-North economic relations)? And how far will assimilatory policies do justice to those who come to the West in order to be free to

practise their particular cultures? At least in a significant number of cases, therefore, the assumption that immigration is a free choice seems less evident than Walzer's argument implies. As Jeff Spinner argues, it is a mistake to think of the Amish, for instance, as liberal citizens since they choose to forgo liberal citizenship: "They came here so they could live in their church community unharmed, not because they believed in some kind of liberal idea."<sup>79</sup>

Secondly, as B. Parekh rightly points out, what immigrants can be expected to do is to acknowledge the authority of the established system of government and to obey its laws, rather than the prevailing form of life and become, in this case, American in their ways of thought and life.<sup>80</sup>

Thirdly, and more importantly, how far is one free to choose or change his culture? There are some ambiguities over the notion of choice in this context. Some, for instance, have argued that religious beliefs (and one may add cultures) are not themselves choices. Rather, they are the things which inform and dictate choices.<sup>81</sup>

None of the above criticism, however, undermines the significance of Walzer's argument about thick and thin moralities.

---

<sup>79</sup> J. Spinner, *The Boundaries of Citizenship* (Baltimore & London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1994), p.97.

<sup>80</sup> B. Parekh, 'The Rushdie Affair: Research Agenda for Political Philosophy', *Political Studies*, 38 (1990), p.701

<sup>81</sup> Cf. S. Mendus *Toleration and the Limits of Liberalism* (London: Macmillan, 1989), p.42. For an interesting discussion about the formation of identity and the difficulties in choosing and revising one's identity see for example J. Spinner, *The Boundaries of Citizenship*, particularly chapter 2.

As mentioned above, it can be very useful when one is concerned with the politics of cultural diversity since it shows both the limits and the power of moral and political discourse in this concern. Thus while we can (even should) appeal to thick moral arguments when political decisions are concerned *within* a particular cultural community, we may reasonably refrain from making thick moral judgments when politics is concerned with the relations *between* different cultural communities. However, Walzer's argument should be viewed only as a good starting point, since it gives rise to several questions. We should be able to work out, for instance, what such a thin morality consists of and what it is capable of, if it is to be used as the basis of the relations between cultural communities: a task which Walzer has not taken far enough.

## 5. Conclusion

Of the three communitarian theories which have been investigated here, Walzer's can be viewed as the closest to liberalism. His conception of the self as culturally situated, and his account of moral discourse as characteristically interpretative, however, is similar to both communitarian and recent communitarianised liberal theories like Rawls's. His approach seems to be capable of accommodating cultural

differences adequately since the person is viewed as essentially a culture-producing creature. Together with his account of shared understanding of social goods, it provides a theory which is more compatible with claims of multiculturalism.

His argument of thin and thick morality, however, distinguishes him from absolute relativism since on this ground he does not entirely rule out the possibility of any cross-cultural common moral ground.

Walzer's problems, however, begin from his equating nations with cultural communities, and his commitment to liberal notions like the private-public distinction which seems to blind him to the extent to which cultural differences matter in politics, even in a country like the United States, which he views as culturally homogenised. For this very reason, he does not think that majorities have any obligation to protect the culture of cultural minorities such as immigrant ethnic groups.

**Part II**

**THE LIBERAL APPROACH**

## CHAPTER 6

### LIBERALISM AND CULTURAL PLURALISM

In the first part of this dissertation the communitarian approach to cultural diversity and its political implications was observed. There we saw how communitarians' concept of the self and their account of the foundations of political morality contributed to their position towards the politics of cultural diversity. In this second part, I shall study the liberal response to claims to the recognition of cultural identity. As in the first part, before exploring the positions of the three selected liberal theorists, it is important to say a few words about the liberal approach to the problem of cultural diversity in general. This is the aim of this chapter. In what follows, I shall present a brief discussion about what can be viewed as the main characteristics of liberalism as an individualist, egalitarian and universalist tradition of moral and political thought in the first section. This is followed by a discussion on pluralism, toleration and neutrality as the three key liberal concepts with respect to cultural diversity, in the second section.

## 1. Essential Characteristics of Liberalism

It is difficult to provide a definition of liberalism upon which all liberals, let alone their opponents, can agree. There are so many ideas which are considered by some as liberal while many others would feel reluctant to characterise them as such. For instance, as the name itself suggests, central to liberalism should be a commitment to freedom. As Waldron argues, however, “[f]reedom or liberty is a concept of which there are many different conceptions.”<sup>1</sup> There are, for instance, liberal thinkers who take their stand on what is called negative freedom, i.e. that a person’s freedom is simply the extent to which he can act unconstrained by interference from others. Others, however, view it in terms of positive freedom, pointing out that true freedom is indispensable from the actual pursuing of one’s favoured course. Moreover, some (e.g. Ronald Dworkin) have argued that instead of freedom itself, it is the concept of freedom for everyone which marks the core of liberal commitment to freedom.<sup>2</sup>

It would be little exaggeration, then, to say that a study of the history of this tradition reveals as many accounts of liberalism as liberal theorists. In other words, with respect to such a diversity within the tradition, it would be more

---

<sup>1</sup> J. Waldron, ‘Theoretical Foundations of Liberalism’, *The Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol.3, No.147, p.130.

<sup>2</sup> R. Dworkin, ‘Liberalism’ in his *A Matter of Principle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp.188-191.

appropriate to speak of *liberalisms* rather than liberalism. It is not to say, however, that these different accounts of liberalism have nothing in common. There are some features of liberalism which can be recognised as shared among these accounts. I believe that most liberal thinkers would readily view liberalism as an individualist, egalitarian and universalist tradition. These shared concepts are those which are more significantly related to my concern here. We need to say a little more about these concepts here.

Individualism can be viewed as one of the most characteristic concepts of liberalism. Just as those engaged in the Enlightenment project were confident that man is fully capable of deducing the world's regularities and fundamental principles and thus able to predict its future in the manner of scientific discovery, and like the empiricist mode in natural science fashionable at the time, liberals have been concerned, though to different extents, with principles which explain the relation of man and society, on the basis of which rules and restraints that must be capable of being justified to the people who are to live under them can be offered. As Waldron puts it, "[l]ike his empiricist counterparts in science, the liberal insists that intelligible justifications in social and political life must be available in principle for everyone, for society is to be understood by the individual mind, not by the tradition or sense



of community".<sup>3</sup> For liberals, therefore, "a social and political order is illegitimate unless it is rooted in the consent of all those who have to live under it; the consent or agreement of these people is a condition of its being morally permissible to enforce that order against them".<sup>4</sup> As a result, liberalism stresses the primacy of individual persons against any form of collectivity.

Secondly, and relatedly, liberalism can also be characterised as egalitarian. This should be understood in connection with its commitment to individualism: all men possess the same moral status as members of the political society. The notion of equality is so central to liberalism that, as mentioned above, liberal thinkers like Dworkin suggest that all basic liberties (like freedoms of speech, association, conscience) are derived from the fundamental liberal commitment to the equality of concern and respect.<sup>5</sup>

The third fundamental element of liberalism, which at the same time is connected to the first two, is that it is universalist. As Gray puts it, the liberal conception of man and society should be understood in terms of "affirming the moral unity of the human species and according a secondary importance to specific historic associations and cultural forms".<sup>6</sup> Consequently, until very recently, all liberal theories were meant to provide rational

---

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.* p.135.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.* p.140

<sup>5</sup> *Cit. opt.*, p.192.

<sup>6</sup> J. Gray, *Liberalism* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1986), p.x.

frameworks applicable not to certain societies in the West but to the human society as such.

All these common features are explicitly or implicitly related to the problem of cultural diversity. As will be observed, for autonomy-based liberalism like that of Raz or Kymlicka, for example, the freedom of individuals enjoys such a priority over other values that all other goods come secondary to it. So far as universality of the liberal politics is concerned, the criticism levelled at the flaws which are associated with the liberal conception of the individual, has forced thinkers like Rawls to revise their works in order to work out their conception of the person as a free and equal citizen, which forms the public culture of democratic societies.<sup>7</sup> This has led to a change in methodology: liberal political theory is now concerned with what is viewed as a common political ground that can alone satisfy the demands of the public reason of democratic societies in the West. But central to any liberal approach to the problem of cultural plurality are three liberal arguments of pluralism, toleration and neutrality, to which we turn in the next section.

---

<sup>7</sup> Cf. S. Mulhall and A. Swift, *Liberals and Communitarians*, (2nd ed.) (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), chapter 6.

## 2. Pluralism, Toleration and Neutrality

Although liberals have usually been thought to be hostile to cultural difference, as Kymlicka shows in his interesting study of the history of liberal views on national minority, such a hostility is rather a recent phenomenon within the tradition. He shows that in nineteenth-century England, for example, there were two liberal views on minority rights: On the one hand, there were liberals like J.S. Mill who called for a common national identity which was deeply tied to an ethnocentric disintegration of smaller national groups. On the other hand, however, there were many nineteenth- and early twentieth-century liberals (e.g. Lord Acton and Alfred Zimmern) who defended minority rights on the grounds of the belief that "individual freedom is tied in some important way to membership in one's national group; and that group-specific rights can promote equality between the minority and majority".<sup>8</sup> But as a result of "the fall of the British Empire, the rise of Cold War conflict, and the prominence of American theorists within post-war liberalism, the heated pre-war debate about national minorities amongst liberals has given way to a virtual silence".<sup>9</sup> Kymlicka then points out the three features of the post-war world which have converted this silence into antagonism towards the recognition of national rights by contemporary liberals: disillusionment with the minority rights

---

<sup>8</sup> W. Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p.52.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* p.56.

scheme of the League of Nations; the American racial desegregation movement; and the ethnic revival amongst immigrant groups in the United States during the 60s and 70s. Contemporary liberal theorists, consequently, neglect arguments of minority rights on the ground that such rights are inconsistent with political unity. Moreover, Kymlicka argues that many contemporary liberals have acquired the belief that minority rights are inherently in conflict with liberal principles. Consequently, liberals today insist that the liberal commitment to individual liberty precludes the acceptance of collective rights, and that the liberal commitment to universal (colour-blind) rights precludes the acceptance of group-specific rights.<sup>10</sup> Kymlicka claims, however, that these bald statements are no part of the liberal tradition:

Few if any liberals, until very recently, supposed that liberal principles allowed only universal individual rights. What contemporary liberals take to be well-established liberal principles are in fact novel additions to the liberal cannon.<sup>11</sup>

As will be seen, it is his goal to work out a defensible liberal account in respect to cultural diversity which is not my concern here and will be explored to some extent in chapter 9. Note, however, that the above point does not mean that liberal

---

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.* p.68.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.* p.68

theorists have produced no argument on difference and if cultural diversity and the legitimacy of claims for the recognition of cultural identities are to be understood at least in part in this way, certain contemporary liberal theorists have implicitly or explicitly been concerned with the problem. Three groups of their arguments are important in this respect: the argument on pluralism, the argument on toleration and the argument for state neutrality. I shall discuss, though briefly, each of them in turn, to see how they have helped to shape liberal concerns with cultural diversity.

Liberal arguments about pluralism highlight an important fact about modern societies, i.e. that, in broad and general terms, the world consists of distinct and often incompatible moral values or sets of values. The most famous exponent of value pluralism is Isaiah Berlin who writes in his seminal essay 'Two Concepts of Liberty' that,

One belief, more than any other, is responsible for the slaughter of individuals on the altars of the great historical ideals... this is the belief that somewhere, in the past or in the future, in divine revelation or in the mind of an individual thinker, in the pronouncements of history or science, or in the simple heart of an uncorrupted good man, there is a final solution. This ancient faith rests on the conviction that all the positive values in which men have believed must, in the end, be compatible and perhaps even entail one another.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> I. Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty' in his *Four Essays on Liberty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), p.167.

According to Waldron, there are three liberal responses to the ethical and religious pluralism of the modern world: Some celebrate such a diversity, others accept it simply as a matter of fact that it is irreducible to a single orthodoxy, and the third group is convinced that any attempt to homogenise the ethical life of our society would be ethically and socially disastrous.<sup>13</sup> The first and the third views, however, are compatible and thus can be seen together as the stronger argument for pluralism whereas the second is a comparatively weaker argument. The practical implications of each view, as will be shortly discussed below, move in two different directions when the liberal principle of toleration is concerned.

The liberal commitment to freedom and the acknowledgement of pluralism (either as an inevitable or as a valuable fact about modern societies) lead us to another argument central to the liberal tradition, i.e. the principle of toleration. This is not to say that toleration is the exclusive preserve of liberals. Rather, as Susan Mendus points out, "toleration has a special and privileged status in the liberal tradition. Liberals are frequently *defined* as people who value liberty and the toleration necessary for the promotion of liberty."<sup>14</sup> How does pluralism lead to toleration? As we saw,

---

<sup>13</sup> Waldron, 'Theoretical Foundations of Liberalism', p.143.

<sup>14</sup> S. Mendus, *Toleration and the Limits of Liberalism* (London: Macmillan, 1989), p.3.

there are two views on pluralism: one which accepts it as an inevitable fact; the other which admits it as a fact but views it at the same time as valuable. Accordingly, for the first view, toleration is a matter of living and letting live, whereas the latter requires a positive welcoming of diversity. As Mendus argues, apart from the content of the concept, there are two other important issues with regard to toleration. The first is concerned with the circumstances of toleration. Accordingly, there are three necessary conditions for toleration: (i) that the problem of toleration arises in circumstances of diversity; (ii) that it is required where the nature of the diversity is such as to give rise to disapproval, dislike and disgust; and (iii) that the tolerator must be in a position to influence the behaviour of the tolerated.<sup>15</sup> This power may or may not be a legal power as it may appear in forms of social pressure (which was first pointed out by J.S. Mill) to bear upon a particular culture.

The second, and more important, issue concerns the scope of toleration. This is explicitly concerned with the problem of cultural diversity since it concerns the limits of the permissible diversity within the liberal society. It is here that, as Mendus rightly notes, most controversies over the concept of toleration, even among liberals, arise. According to her, there are two distinguishable schools of thought in this respect: some believe that toleration is a concept which can properly be applied only to

---

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.* pp.8-9.

things which we disapprove morally. Others claim that it may equally be applied to things which are merely disliked. The former construe toleration narrowly, the latter more widely.<sup>16</sup> Mendus then goes on to distinguish the kinds of justification which underlie these two. The first, which is essentially Lockian, emphasises the irrationality of intolerance, whereas the second, which is essentially Millian, argues for the morality of tolerance. It is this latter argument for toleration which puts autonomy at the heart of liberalism, even claiming it, as Raz and Kymlicka explicitly do and Rawls as well, though with less emphasis, as *the* liberal value. Autonomy-based interpretations of liberalism insist on the value of individual autonomy in terms of freedom of choice and revisability and it is these two which represent the core of certain arguments, advanced by thinkers like Raz and Kymlicka, which attempt to accommodate multiculturalism within a liberal framework. Whether or not such a strategy succeeds is a question to which I shall turn in chapters 8 and 9.

The principle of toleration so understood, leads us to another question: What should the liberal state do in a plural society with respect to the principle of toleration? Many liberal thinkers, including Rawls, have argued that the liberal state should be neutral towards such a diversity so far as it concerns people's conceptions of the good. This requires an argument on the priority of rights over the good (as for Rawls), or on moral

---

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.* p.13



scepticism (as for Ackerman). Some liberals like Raz, however, have shown the idea of neutrality to be flawed and, therefore, have suggested that since the survival of a liberal culture which can foster pluralism needs protection and support, the liberal state must be, at least to some extent, perfectionist since in this view the state must ensure that the preconditions for leading an autonomous life are available to individuals. In response, Rawls has tried to use the idea of political (as in contrast to metaphysical) liberalism as the basis of an overlapping consensus. Yet thinkers like Kymlicka have chosen something of a *via media* by appealing to an indirect perfectionism.

The idea of political neutrality has been itself understood in different ways. Charles Larmore, for instance, has argued that liberals should distinguish the neutrality of outcome, which he views as impracticable, from the more justifiable neutrality of procedure which for him means a state decision "which can be justified without appealing to the presumed intrinsic superiority of any particular conception of the good life".<sup>17</sup> William Galston adds to this list two more accounts of neutrality: the neutrality of aim, which maintains that state policies should not strive to promote any permissible way of life or conception of the good over any other; and neutrality of opportunity which claims that "liberalism alone is capacious enough to allow all ways of life to

---

<sup>17</sup> C. Larmore, *Patterns of Moral Complexity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p.44.

exist, and is on that basis the preferred form of political organization".<sup>18</sup> According to this classification, as will be observed, Rawls favours the neutrality of aim, though he argues that it is distinct from the neutrality of effects or influence. Raz, on the other hand, refutes neutrality in its entirety. Kymlicka, however, rejects the possibility of the neutrality of outcome while holding that procedural neutrality is necessary.

The concern of this part, therefore, is to examine how far each of the strategies mentioned above succeeds in providing plausible answers to the two questions which I asked at the beginning of this study, i.e. in what sense can the existing cultural diversity of multicultural liberal societies be understood, and in what sense and to what extent can such diversity be politically recognised? In order to see how far the three liberal responses which are presented in this part succeed in answering these question, however, we need to assess their theories in more depth with respect to our main three themes, i.e. the concept of the self they hold: their account of the foundations of political morality; and their view on the politics of cultural diversity: a task which I shall begin in the next chapter.

---

<sup>18</sup> W. Galston, *Liberal Purposes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p.100.

## CHAPTER 7

### RAWLS: POLITICAL LIBERALISM AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY

The title of this chapter may surprise those who are familiar with John Rawls's works since none of his arguments deal explicitly with the problem of cultural diversity. In what follows, however, I shall try to show that his writings, particularly his recent publications, have important implications for the problem. Rawls is well known to anyone with an interest in contemporary political philosophy. His writings have played an important role in the revival of the discipline in the aftermath of the challenge of the contemporary linguistic school. Although I shall begin with a short discussion of his *Theory of Justice* in which I shall outline those of his basic ideas which have implications for our discussion, I will concentrate on his recent book *Political Liberalism* since in this book he has attempted to refine and correct the doctrine of the *Theory*.<sup>1</sup> More importantly, Rawls himself notes that "I reached a clear understanding of political liberalism- or so I think- only in the past few years"<sup>2</sup> which shows the significance of this book in studying what have been called

---

<sup>1</sup> J. Rawls. *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard University press, 1971); J. Rawls. *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

<sup>2</sup> Rawls. *Political Liberalism*. p. xxxi.

'the new Rawls'.<sup>3</sup> *Political Liberalism* is not, therefore, simply a collection of Rawls's recent essays. Even many of his previously published essays over the last two decades have been revised and "considerably adjusted so that together they express what I now believe is a consistent view".<sup>4</sup>

Let us begin first with an overall outline of what can be viewed as the basic structure of the *Theory* since, through understanding its fundamental ideas, Rawls's later arguments in *Political Liberalism* will be more comprehensible. The aim of *Theory*, as Rawls writes, is to construct a workable and systematic moral conception of justice from a liberal standpoint to oppose utilitarianism and intuitionism which were predominant in moral philosophy at the time. In order to do so, Rawls employs the classical contractarian approach which was mainly represented by Locke, Rousseau and Kant, though he tries to avoid the difficulties which these philosophers had confronted. The aim of *Theory*, in sum, is to offer a theory of justice which constitutes what he considers as the most appropriate moral basis for a democratic society. The *Theory* is a search for social justice and its subject is the basic structure of society by which he means "the way in which the major social institutions distribute fundamental rights and duties and determine the division of

---

<sup>3</sup> See for example S. Mulhall and A. Swift, *Liberalism and Communitarians*, (2nd ed.) (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996).

<sup>4</sup> Rawls, op. cit., p. xxxi.

advantages from social cooperation".<sup>5</sup> Its scope, however, is limited since its principles are not intended to work for private associations, voluntary communities and the law of nations. Rather, it is a theory to regulate what he calls a well-ordered society with two characteristics: first, that it is closed in the sense that membership is determined by birth and death, and second, that it is economically self-sufficient. In short, the theory is designed for the ideal form of the modern nation-state. To use the social contract model as a means of justification, it is argued, is necessary so that free and rational persons who are imagined in an original position (situated behind a veil of ignorance where they would not have access to certain information) make unanimously a choice of a particular conception of justice. As a result of such a veil of ignorance, parties do not know how the various alternatives would affect their own particular case and "they are obliged to evaluate the principles solely on the basis of general considerations".<sup>6</sup> Under these conditions they would agree unanimously on the two principles of justice:

#### First Principle

Each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive total system of equal basic liberties compatible with a similar system of liberty for all.

#### Second Principle

Social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both:

(a) to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged.

---

<sup>5</sup> Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, p.7.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* p. 137.

consistent with just savings principle, and  
(b) attached to offices and positions open to all  
under conditions of fair equality of opportunity.<sup>7</sup>

This is the main structure of the *Theory*. I do not intend to discuss it in full detail but there are two features of the *Theory* which are important for my discussion:

First, as Rawls frequently mentions, the *Theory* is an anti-perfectionist project. His definition of perfectionism runs as follows: “[t]eleological doctrines differ, pretty clearly, according to how the conception of the good is specified. If it is taken as the realization of human excellence in the various forms of culture, we have what may be called perfectionism”.<sup>8</sup> By giving the right priority over the good, the *Theory* tries to avoid the existing controversies over the conception of the good. It aims to be universally acceptable to all persons, whatever their conceptions of the good are. Choosing the conception of the good is subject to individual decision and not the goal of the well-ordered society as a whole. Since justice as fairness was constructed to oppose utilitarianism, Rawls underlines the contrast between them through characterising the latter as teleological whereas the former is described as deontological in terms of being “one that either does not specify the good independently from the right, or it does not interpret the right as

---

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p.302. The two principles are first stated on p.60 and changed slightly throughout the book. I have quoted their final version above.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p.25.

maximizing the good".<sup>9</sup>

Secondly, the *Theory* is based upon the conception of the person as a rational agent. Justice as fairness suggests that the acceptance of the two principles of justice is the outcome of a process in which in order to avoid any particularity (which may undermine the universality of the result) parties are considered as rational persons who are situated in a particular position. It is supposed that these persons, by referring to their rationality, would choose a conception of justice which is acceptable to any individual in any society.

Since the publication of *Theory*, different aspects of it, including Rawls's conceptions of person, rationality, impartiality and perfectionism, have received enormous criticism. However, only some of these criticisms, which are more relevant to the subject of this dissertation, will be addressed in this and later chapters.

We can turn now to Rawls's later position as presented in *Political Liberalism*. The main question which political liberalism addresses is:

[H]ow is it possible that there can be a stable and just society whose free and equal citizens are deeply divided by conflicting and even incommensurable religious, philosophical and moral doctrines?<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* p.30.

<sup>10</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, p.133.

This highlights the main ideas which are discussed in the book. Corresponding to the three themes of the present survey, the structure of this chapter will be as follows: So far as the concept of the self (the first theme) is concerned, Rawls now speaks about a conception of the person *qua* citizen which will be discussed in section 1. As Rawls claims, this concept is implicit in the public culture of constitutional democracies. This culture also reflects what he calls 'the fact of pluralism' which implies that no religious, philosophical, or moral doctrine is affirmed by all citizens. Justice as fairness, therefore, is viewed now as a political ideal through which Rawls avoids controversies of moral philosophies. It is, in other words, only partially comprehensive. Hence his account of the foundation of political morality, which connects section 1 to section 2. Rawls argues that justice as fairness can be agreed in an overlapping consensus since political liberalism is neutral towards comprehensive doctrines. Whether or not it can be applied to multicultural societies is a question which is the concern of the third section, which follows with a conclusion in section 4.

### **1. The Political Conception of the Self**

As has been mentioned above, *Political Liberalism* is the result of Rawls's attempt to offer a more acceptable defence of



the main ideas of the *Theory*. He tries to reply to those criticisms which have questioned both the theoretical basis he suggests in *Theory* and its feasibility. Rawls offers a group of arguments in which some criticisms are corrected as misunderstandings, and revises his view where the *Theory* seems fallacious. The main revision, as is obvious from the title of the book, is that he has restricted the scope of the application of the *Theory* into the domain of politics:

The aim of justice as fairness, then, is practical: it presents itself as a conception of justice that may be shared by citizens as a basis of a reasoned, informed, and willing political agreement. It expresses their shared and public political reason.<sup>11</sup>

Key terms of the above statement need further clarifications. First, justice as fairness is practical because it "offers no specific metaphysical or epistemological doctrine beyond what is implied by the political conception itself".<sup>12</sup>

Secondly, it is a conception on which individuals as free and equal citizens can agree unanimously. They are free in that they possess the moral power to have a conception of the good; and that in evaluating their conceptions of the good they regard themselves as self-authenticating sources of valid claims.<sup>13</sup> The

---

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. p.9

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. p.11.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, pp. 30-32.

reason for which persons are viewed here as citizens is that, as Rawls claims, while other aspects of individuals' identities may change, individuals are always and unchangeably citizens of one state or another.<sup>14</sup> This conception of citizenship accommodates justice as fairness within the democratic tradition.

Thirdly, it is a political conception, i.e. a conception which affects only the domain of politics. Note, however, that while the sphere of politics is separated quite sharply from other (non-political) spheres, it is not defined narrowly, since the concept of the political "governs the basic framework of social life- the very groundwork of our existence- and specifies the fundamental terms of political and social cooperation".<sup>15</sup> Although nowhere in his book does he suggest a definition of politics, he offers discussions of its subject, scope, source and status, to which I shall turn shortly.

Politics is concerned with a wide range of social institutions. It is the political conception of justice which should regulate the basic structure of the society which includes not only political but also major social and economic institutions. The scope of politics, Rawls argues, is the society as perceived in contrast with community and association. By a well-ordered democratic society he means, roughly, a democratic political system. It differs from an association in two respects: first, the former has no final ends

---

<sup>14</sup> Rawls's own example is about conversion to another religion which, in his view, although it affects one's religious identity, does not change one's identity as a citizen.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p.139.

whereas the latter has; and second, in the former membership is not voluntary because it is viewed as a complete and closed social system. Moreover, it is not a community because it is not governed by a shared comprehensive religious, philosophical or moral doctrine. Rawls argues that “[t]o think of a democracy as a community (so defined) overlooks the limited scope of its public reason founded on a political conception of justice. It mistakes the kind of unity a constitutional regime is capable of without violating the most basic democratic principles”.<sup>16</sup>

I think Rawls’ argument about the contrasts between democratic societies on the one hand and associations and communities on the other hand is presented in an ambiguous way as if he implies that the latter are necessarily undemocratic. But why should it be assumed that every form of political community would necessarily violate democratic principles? Is it not possible to imagine a political community which is based on voluntary membership of its members who have admitted autonomously a shared religious, philosophical or moral doctrine? It can be argued, however, that this model cannot be applied to the modern nation-state system, an important feature of which is the plurality of ideas of good. Even if this is true, it undermines the practicability of the political community, not its moral significance. In this respect it would be more adequate for Rawls to argue (as in fact he does) for the practicability of his model in

---

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.* p 42

a contemporary world system of nation-states. It does not mean, therefore, that any alternative model, like a political community, is necessarily undemocratic. Rawls can also argue that political communities cannot be liberal democracies. But many would argue that for them, democracy means that the political authorities governing a particular community should be accountable to its citizens through periodic elections. For many it would be undemocratic if the alternative model excluded all other doctrines from any political activity. It would be undemocratic also if it did not respect autonomous political participation by citizens. If toleration is to be understood as an essential democratic principle, it would be undemocratic if such a community did not tolerate other doctrines. But for a community to be based on voluntary membership and regulated by a comprehensive doctrine does not, by itself, mean that it is undemocratic.

For Rawls, the source of politics is the fundamental ideas implicit in the public culture of the democratic society. A political conception of justice, therefore, should be worked out of the shared public culture. The fact, however, is that contrary to Rawls' view, since most democratic societies in the contemporary West are multicultural, there is no such thing as a homogeneous culture that all people share. Moreover, even if there actually was such a thing as a shared public culture, while it

could be used as a source, it would not mean that such ideas were justified, merely because they were embedded in that shared culture.

It is important to see the function of the publicity condition in greater detail. An interesting example which illustrates how this condition of publicity works can be found where Rawls discusses the relation between religious beliefs and the political conception of justice. I have deliberately chosen this example since certain forms of cultural diversity are represented by religious communities. Rawls argues that those comprehensive doctrines (including religions) which insist on the truth of their own beliefs would impose their beliefs when they have the political power to do so. Similarly, every doctrine can insist on the truth of its own beliefs. Reasonable persons, however, "see that the burdens of judgment set limits on what can be reasonably justified to others".<sup>17</sup>

Rawls's discussion on the truth of religious doctrines implies that whether or not these such beliefs are true is a matter to be resolved within such doctrines rather than between them. The fact which such arguments fail to see is that when a person believes in a religion, he or she believes in its superiority over others as far as truth is concerned. Otherwise, there would be no good reason for his or her preference. It does not necessarily

---

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* p.61. For the full discussion on the burdens of judgment see Rawls's argument on pp 54-58

mean that the adherents of a religion see no truth in other religions at all. They may see degrees of truth in other faiths, but they certainly believe that theirs is more acceptable in this respect.

Here, Rawls removes the truth of religion from the political agenda since through doing so we would account for the liberty of conscience. This exclusion of religion's truths is justified since matters like this "are part of the public charter of a constitutional regime", "reasonably taken as fixed" and "correctly settled once and for all".<sup>18</sup> But even if it is so, does it provide any ground for its justification? What if a religious person does not agree? What if such a person cannot believe in the exclusion of beliefs from politics? The point which Rawls fail to see is the possibility that when one believes in a religion (especially if it has substantial claims on political issues), the conception of politics (and arguments concerning its source, scope, status etc.) may be accommodated within one's religious beliefs.

Rawls argues in many places in *Political Liberalism* that the conception of justice as fairness is political in three senses: first, it is to be applied solely to the basic structure of society; second, it is elaborated in terms of 'political' ideas embedded in the public culture of a democratic society; and third, it is presented independently of any wider comprehensive doctrine. It is this latter which concerns the status of politics. In *Political Liberalism*

---

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p.151 n.

justice as fairness, unlike in *Theory*, is political and not metaphysical. Note that Rawls does not mean by this that it cannot be presented as a part of a comprehensive doctrine. Rather, it means that it is not a consequence of any general and comprehensive doctrine. What Rawls means by comprehensiveness and generality of a doctrine can be summarised as follows: A doctrine (religious, philosophical, or moral) is general “when it applies to a wide range of subjects” and “it is comprehensive when it includes conceptions of what is of value in human life, as well as ideas of personal virtue and character, that are to inform much of our nonpolitical conduct”.<sup>19</sup>

A doctrine is either fully comprehensive when it covers all recognised values and virtues within one scheme of thought, or partially comprehensive when it includes certain but not all of such values and virtues. Recall that for Rawls political and non-political values are distinguishable and distinct. Political values, he claims, are independent from non-political values and subjects of a different and distinct domain. Recall also that Rawls argues further that there is no good reason for proposing a conception of justice which favours a particular doctrine. It is the aim of political liberalism to construct a universally acceptable framework which is not derived from any fully comprehensive and general doctrine since comprehensive doctrines cannot serve as the professed basis of the society and cannot be endorsed by

---

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.* p.175.

all citizens .

The status which the political conception of justice enjoys among comprehensive doctrines will be clearer after we explore Rawls's view of pluralism and his idea of an overlapping consensus. I am more concerned at the moment with its subject and scope. The distinction he draws between the political and non-political is itself concerned with a particular notion of privacy. Larry Peterman offers a clear discussion about the idea of privacy and its root in the history of the West. He rightly mentions that the subject has rarely been paid the attention it deserves: a fact which indicates that the high valuation of privacy is usually taken for granted. Privacy has been considered as a sphere which should be protected from unwanted interference by others, including political authorities. Through a critical analysis of works of authors like Hannah Arendt, Peterman shows that the source of conceptions of the private versus the public is neither the ancient Greek nor the Roman cultures. Rather, the changes in Western thought on this subject have been brought about by Christianity. The contemporary understanding of privacy originates from the New Testament and early Christianity since charity, which is characteristically distinguishable from private love, became the critical virtue in the Christian order. It was from then, Peterman argues, that these arose the notion of "a private life lived apart from political life, as a consequence of the loving



spirit and of virtues which are not subject to the public law".<sup>20</sup> Liberalism has inherited this notion of privacy which is central to the value which it attributes to the individual and its high valuation of individual's domain.

There are two other conceptions at the heart of liberalism: the way religion is perceived, and partly as a consequence of this, the conception of the political which is viewed as secular. It is about the former which I would like to explain a little more here, though very briefly. When reading about religion and religious doctrine in works like that of Rawls, it is important to bear in mind that the conception of religion to which references are made is not religion *qua* religion, but a particular conception which is based firmly on Christianity as experienced in the West. It is important because while religion is addressed in general, the characteristics which are offered and the historical evidence which is employed match Christianity and not any other known religion. Cultural communities which are based on religions other than Christianity may not, therefore, agree on arguments related to this matter proposed by liberals. Although it has been mentioned before, it would be helpful to point out in what way the Christian connection of liberalism makes its political ideas connected to a particular culture. An interesting article by Larry Siedentop shows how and in what sense liberalism has inherited its fundamental conceptions from Christianity. He argues that

---

<sup>20</sup> Larry Peterman, 'Privacy's Background', *The Review of Politics*, Vol. 55, Spring 1993, No.2.

when Western scholars describe contemporary Western societies as secular and materialistic, they miss the fact that Western distinctions between the state and civil society, and between the public and private spheres, are themselves derived from Christian assumptions: "That is, they rest on a framework of assumptions and valuations which can be described broadly as individualist and which historically conform in crucial respects to the framework of Christian theology".<sup>21</sup> While religion is no longer paramount in the West, and philosophy and moral doctrines have occupied most of its place, for other cultures religion may still provide the core of belief and "provides the constituents of personal identity, the crucial source of social integration, and the key to the nature of things".<sup>22</sup> By contrast, the predominant view is that "the political and social vocabulary of the West apparently makes it possible to devalue beliefs as the source of social order by way of its distinctions between the public and private spheres, the state and civil society, ritual and truly moral action".<sup>23</sup> However, Siedentop remarks, this interpretation fails to see how deeply such distinctions are related with Christian assumptions. It fails to realise, for instance, that the birth of the individual in the West was a Christian achievement. He concludes that "Christian ontology is the foundation of what are usually described as liberal

---

<sup>21</sup> L. Siedentop, 'Liberalism: The Christian connection', *Times Literary Supplement* 24-30 March 1989, p.308.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p.308.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p.308.

values in the West".<sup>24</sup>

What consequence does such a historical connection between Christianity and liberalism bring about? The problem is that, as a result of its cultural particularity, the distinction between the political and the non-political (i.e. religious) may not be established as such for citizens of other cultural backgrounds. As will be observed in the next section, Rawlsian political liberalism suggests that justice as fairness can be used as the ground for an overlapping consensus. However, there can be (and actually are) cultural communities which live within liberal democracies but do not (and in some cases cannot) agree with Rawls on such a sharp distinction between these two spheres. Andrea Baumeister has shown the difficulties which such a disagreement can create for a multicultural education system.<sup>25</sup> She notices there that "unlike most interpretations of Christianity, Islam does not recognise a secular sphere. The *shari'a*, or divine law, integrates political, social and economic life and regulates both private and public life. Furthermore, Islam does not share Christianity's other-worldness, but is characterized by a commitment to actions in this world and a belief that it is possible to build a prosperous and just social order in this world".<sup>26</sup> It is hard to see, therefore, how cultural

---

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.* p.308.

<sup>25</sup> A. Baumeister, 'Political Liberalism, Education and Pluralism'. Paper presented at Political Theory Seminar, Department of Politics, University of Hull, 1994.

<sup>26</sup> *ibid.* p.11.

communities which live within constitutional democracies but do not agree on the liberal public-private distinction would accept the political conception which Rawls is offering here. This becomes clearer in the next section which concerns Rawls's argument on pluralism and the idea of an overlapping consensus.

## **2. Pluralism and the Overlapping Consensus**

The discussion of pluralism emerges where Rawls characterises the political culture of a democratic society through pointing out three facts about it: (i) the fact of pluralism, (ii) the fact of oppression, and (iii) the fact of being supported willingly and freely by the majority of its citizens. My concern at the moment is with the first and the second facts. By the fact of pluralism, Rawls means a dominant feature of modern democratic societies which indicates that no religious, philosophical, or moral doctrine is affirmed by all citizens.

I do not agree, however, that being described as such, plurality of doctrines is a feature that can be attributed only to societies that are characterised as modern democracies. Nor can I agree with Rawls on what he calls the fact of oppression which suggests that "[i]f we think of political society as a community united in affirming one and the same comprehensive doctrine, then the oppressive use of state power is necessary for political

community”<sup>27</sup>, since there is no necessary relation between the unification of individuals under a comprehensive doctrine and the use of oppressive political power. The fact is that here again, as in many other discussions (some of which have been mentioned previously), his argument is rather based on particular historical evidence of the West. However, there is a good deal of historical evidence about multi-religious societies where different religious communities tolerated each other and lived side by side in peace and order.<sup>28</sup>

My main disagreement, however, is with regard to the value which Rawls attributes to pluralism. since he does not suggest that it is merely an unavoidable feature of modern societies. but believes that it is (desirably) valuable. He argues that liberalism “tries to show both that a plurality of conceptions of the good is desirable and how a regime of liberty can accommodate this plurality so as to achieve the many benefits of human diversity”.<sup>29</sup> To suggest that pluralism is desirable implies that it is a good either intrinsically or instrumentally valuable. Now if Rawls intends to suggest that pluralism is intrinsically valuable (i.e. valuable in itself), it can be questioned why something which

---

<sup>27</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, p.37.

<sup>28</sup> In this respect, the coexistence of a variety of religious faiths in the Muslim world is an interesting example. In the first Islamic state founded by Prophet Mohammad in Medina, Jews and Christians were free to practise their own ways of life. They educated their children as they liked. They even had their own courts of justice. There, unlike in the West, religious minorities were not subject to assimilation or political oppression for their beliefs. It was not, however, a liberal society in Rawls's sense. But examples like this indicates the important point that Rawls's argument here cannot rule out the possibility of societies which are unified under a comprehensive doctrine *per se*.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.* p.304.

undermines (potentially at least) the unity of a society and its stability (a value which for Rawls too is important) is valuable? Even if it was not possible in reality, at least we can imagine a society in which individuals believe in one conception of the good in form of a religious, philosophical, or moral doctrine. Through a comparison between such a society which does not necessarily override the freedom and willingness of its members, with a plural (as perceived by Rawls) society, one would reasonably prefer the former. Moreover, one could argue that the unitary political community may have advantages over the plural society since, for example, its members would show less apathy and participate more effectively in the process of political decision-making.<sup>30</sup>

The other possibility is that what Rawls has in mind is the instrumental value of pluralism, since it enlarges the range of choice available to individuals, which seems to be a more defensible claim.<sup>31</sup> It should be noted, however, that as some critics have argued, more choice can have unwanted costs and it is not unreasonable to suggest that some choices currently available to individuals in a society have undesirable consequences at the collective level, and that they ought to be curtailed.<sup>32</sup>

---

<sup>30</sup> For an interesting discussion on this matter see for example J. J. Mansbridge, *Beyond Adversary Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).

<sup>31</sup> This is what liberal thinkers like Kymlicka suggest for a theory of multicultural liberal society which will be discussed in chapter 9.

<sup>32</sup> See for example D. Bell, *Communitarian and Its Critics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p.141

To value pluralism and to regard it as desirable, therefore, cannot be without difficulty. It can be suggested, however, that in the present world system of nation-states, pluralism is an unavoidable reality and that any political theory which is concerned with a just political system is bound to deal with it in a just way. This may be a more acceptable strategy for Rawls and he could justify his idea of an overlapping consensus, to which we turn shortly, by referring to it.

Before exploring the Rawlsian consensus, however, there are two more distinctions which are drawn by Rawls and which are important to his idea of consensus. The first is the distinction between the Reasonable and the Rational. Reasonableness is defined in terms of readiness to propose principles and standards as fair terms of cooperation whereas rationality concerns seeking one's own ends, irrespective of what other persons' ends are. The Reasonable, therefore, is by nature public whereas the Rational is not. The same is true about doctrines (whether religious, philosophical, or moral) and a reasonable person affirms only a reasonable doctrine which has, according to Rawls, three main features: It is an exercise of theoretical reason, an exercise of practical reason, and it belongs to a tradition of thought.

A further distinction is drawn between those conceptions of justice which allow for a plurality of reasonable (though opposing) comprehensive doctrines and those which do not.

Examples of the latter includes Plato's, Aristotle's, Augustine and Aquinas's theories and extend through Bentham, Edgeworth, Sidgwick, to contemporaries like Dworkin and Raz. The former is represented, Rawls claims, by political liberalism which "supposes that there are many conflicting reasonable comprehensive doctrines with their conception of the good, each compatible with the full rationality of human persons, so far as that can be ascertained with the resources of a political conception of justice".<sup>33</sup>

We have seen that Rawls argues that citizens have two distinct views: a political view, and a comprehensive view. Citizens *qua* citizen would work out a conception of justice which is solely based on values which are derived from their political view, and as will be discussed later, Rawls believes that if there is a conflict between these two kinds of view, citizens should revise their comprehensive view in favour of their political view. Now, in order to have a stable political system, political liberalism suggests an overlapping consensus based on justice as fairness. This means that a political conception which respects the fact of reasonable pluralism is not based on the existing balance of power between comprehensive doctrines. Moreover, as shown above, it stands against the idea of political community and in fact "the hope of political community must be indeed be abandoned" since it excludes, Rawls claims, the fact of reasonable

---

<sup>33</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, p.135.



pluralism. Rather, the political conception of justice is based on an idea of overlapping consensus “as contrasts to the notion of *modus vivendi*”.<sup>34</sup> Rawls employs a model of *modus vivendi* as it is used to characterise a treaty between two states which are in conflict. Accordingly, the equilibrium in a *modus vivendi* is based on particular circumstances and its stability is only apparent. By contrast, an overlapping consensus is based on a moral object, i.e., the political conception of justice, and moral grounds, i.e. the conceptions of citizens and persons, principles of justice and political virtues expressed in public culture. Rawls excludes (fully) comprehensive doctrines from the consensus since by doing so, he tries to “bypass religion and philosophy’s profoundest controversies so as to have some hope of uncovering a basis of a stable overlapping consensus”.<sup>35</sup>

For Rawls, the political conception of justice enjoys a superiority over all comprehensive doctrines, since even if we hold a (not necessarily fully) comprehensive doctrine, “we do not put forward more of our comprehensive view than we think needed or useful for the political aims of consensus”.<sup>36</sup> Rawls offers three main reasons for this superiority of the political: First, that a political system based on a comprehensive doctrine is not a democratic constitutional regime; second, that the liberal conception of justice is the most reasonable for a democratic

---

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, p.147.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, p.152.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, p.153.

regime; and third, that the stability of the society is secured since conflicts are reduced.<sup>37</sup> Rawls concludes that the consequences of giving such a status to the political is that if some citizens see it as incompatible with their comprehensive doctrines, “they might very well adjust or revise those doctrines rather than reject those principles [of justice]”.<sup>38</sup>

This argument, however, is open to several questions. As has been argued above, there is no reason to assume that every political regime which is based on a comprehensive doctrine is undemocratic *per se*, but only in the liberal state. Moreover, it is not clear why one should admit such a superiority of the political conception, as suggested by political liberalism, over his or her own comprehensive doctrine. Why should one not do the reverse? Why not revise the conception of the political so that it can be accommodated within one’s comprehensive religious, philosophical or moral doctrine? What if for a general and comprehensive doctrine the political is not distinct from other spheres as it is for liberalism? As Wenar puts it, the Rawlsian appeal to the theory of public reason to resolve the conflict between citizens’ comprehensive views and constructivism suggests that “citizens can think to themselves that God or an independent moral order or whatever is the real source of objective reasons, but must speak as if constructivism has

---

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid* pp.156-157.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, p.160.

overriding authority when engaging in political discourse”.<sup>39</sup> But, as he rightly points out, public reason can give citizens reasons for appealing in public to only part of what they believe, but it can’t give citizens reasons to profess beliefs that contradict their beliefs at the deepest level and, therefore, there can be no stable overlapping consensus. Consequently,

[T]his sort of public reason would inevitably result in hypocrisy (where people publicly endorse policies they privately reject) or cheating (where people bend their public reasoning toward the conclusions they are really convinced of). This is not the sort of public reason that Rawls wants, and we should not construe public reason in this way to solve the problems with constructivism.<sup>40</sup>

Rawls suggests that since justice as fairness is now presented as a political conception, it would be accepted as the focus of a consensus. Wenar, however, rightly points out that “justice as fairness as presented in *Political Liberalism* fails to live up to its self-image as a political conception”.<sup>41</sup> Political Liberalism, as we saw above, is supposed to be (i) a political conception which is freestanding, presented independently of any comprehensive doctrine; (ii) independent of long-lasting controversies in philosophy; and (iii) which articulates only political values. Rawls claims that many familiar religious and

---

<sup>39</sup> L. Wenar, 'Political Liberalism: An Internal Critique', *Ethics* 106 (October 1995), p.56.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.56-57.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p.33.

philosophical views could converge on justice as fairness in an overlapping consensus. However, as Wenar shows (through an elaborated discussion), very few comprehensive views will support such a consensus: many others like the followers of Bentham, Humeans, Hobbes's followers and theorists like David Gauthier are left outside. He concludes, that there may be a conception of justice within *Political Liberalism* that is independent and inclusive enough to fit Rawls's image of a political conception, but this conception is only part of the full theory that Rawls lays out. Therefore,

The full theory that Rawls advances is, in fact, not a political conception but a partially comprehensive doctrine- a doctrine that could support a political conception within an overlapping consensus, but that is itself too exclusionary to be the focus of such a consensus. Very few comprehensive view, as we now know them or can expect them to become, will support justice as fairness as Rawls describes it.<sup>42</sup>

This shows that while Rawls initially intends to offer a consensus on which most religious, moral and philosophical doctrines can agree, at the end it turns out too narrow, excluding many doctrines and acceptable only to a Kantian liberal view. As Wenar puts it,

Rawls hopes that by presenting a political theory based on the reasonable and not the true, with a conception of objectivity and of public reason, he

---

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p.33.

can show us how we can come to be unified despite our diversity and to reason together despite our disagreements. In fashioning a theory that he believes strong enough to attract this convergence he has built in the primacy of Kantian political values.<sup>43</sup>

With respect to the source, status, subject and scope of politics as it is perceived by Rawls, therefore, it is not difficult to observe that his conception is in fact derived from a particular comprehensive doctrine, i.e. liberalism. Those who hold a different conception of politics, therefore, will face difficulties in a Rawlsian liberal political system as their conception may not be based on similar distinctions, or enjoy a similar status, and so on.

### **3. Perfectionism and Neutrality**

We finally arrive at our last heading which is concerned with Rawls's anti-perfectionist position and his idea of the political neutrality of the state. In the brief introduction to *Theory* presented at the beginning of this chapter, we explored both the anti-perfectionist feature of justice as fairness and the neutrality of parties who participate in the original position, situated behind the veil of ignorance. The idea was that since no sole conception of the good is able to serve all persons' social life, it should be excluded from the conception of a theory of

---

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.* p.60.

justice. The anti-perfection character and the idea of neutrality are developed to a wider extent in *Political Liberalism*. The demand for neutrality emerges as follows: On the one hand, given the fact of conflicting comprehensive conceptions of the good represented in religious, philosophical, or moral doctrines, we face the problem of how to reach a political understanding of what are to be considered as appropriate claims. On the other hand, the state "can no more act to maximize the fulfilment of citizens' rational preferences, or wants (as in utilitarianism), or to advance human excellence, or the values of perfection (as in perfectionism)".<sup>44</sup> It is Rawls's solution, therefore:

To find a shared idea of citizens' good appropriate for political liberalism looks for an idea of rational advantage within a political conception that is independent of any particular comprehensive doctrine and hence may be the focus an overlapping consensus.<sup>45</sup>

What kind of neutrality does political liberalism suggest? Rawls argues that justice as fairness is not procedurally neutral: "it seeks common ground- or if one prefers, neutral ground- given the fact of pluralism. This common ground is the political conception itself as the focus of an overlapping consensus. But common ground, so defined, is not procedurally neutral ground".<sup>46</sup> Instead, political liberalism is neutral in aim.

---

<sup>44</sup> Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, pp.179-180.

<sup>45</sup> *ibid* p.180

<sup>46</sup> *ibid* p.182

According to Rawls the neutrality of aim, however, should not be confused with the neutrality of effect or influence since it allows only permissible conceptions and expresses the priority of right over the good. He claims that although political liberalism affirms the superiority of certain forms of moral character and encourages certain virtues, this would not lead to the perfectionist state of a comprehensive doctrine since these virtues and values are shared by citizens and are independent of any particular comprehensive doctrine, a claim which was shown above as false. Mulhall and Swift have argued that in his effort to provide a purely political defence of anti-perfectionism, Rawls faces a dilemma:

He can either observe the requirement that his theory of justice restricts itself to the domain of the political, but only at the cost of regarding his commitment to anti-perfectionism as circumstance-dependent; or he can maintain the inviolability of his anti-perfectionism, but only at the cost of invoking elements of a more comprehensive liberal doctrine.<sup>47</sup>

Now by choosing the first option, he would make a substantive concession to his perfectionist critics by ceding the absoluteness of his anti-perfectionism. As seems most likely, however, he chooses the second option, as result of which he would be forced to admit that the supposedly purely political Rawlsian state is in

---

<sup>47</sup> S. Mulhall and A. Swift, *Liberals & Communitarians*, p.226.

fact based upon a comprehensive doctrine. Consequently, it would fail to live up to its own claims to neutrality.

This reveals more explicitly Rawls' commitment to liberalism as a comprehensive doctrine. This argument undermines the possibility of political neutrality, while there are other arguments which question even the desirability of the idea. Joseph Raz's discussion on this subject is an outstanding example of such arguments which will attract our attention in the next chapter.

#### 4. Conclusion

In *Political Liberalism*, Rawls offers an understanding of his theory of justice as fairness which on some points differs from the account presented in the *Theory*. The person is now viewed *qua* citizen, leaving all controversies between different comprehensive religious, philosophical and moral doctrines to the private spheres of life. This conception of citizenship, Rawls argues, is implicit in the shared political culture of constitutional democracies. Thus he no longer claims that his theory is universally valid. Justice as fairness is to be understood as political, not metaphysical, and can be used as the foundation of political morality to form an overlapping consensus.

The three main objections to Rawls's political liberalism and



his idea of overlapping consensus which are discussed here can be summarised as follows.

First, Rawls proposes a conception of the political to which the distinction between the political and non-political spheres is fundamental. It plays a crucial role as a premise for his idea of overlapping consensus. This conception, contrary to his claim, is derived from the comprehensive doctrine of liberalism which, consequently, may not be acceptable to other traditions of thought and cultures.

Secondly, there are two difficulties upon Rawls' understanding of culture. First, he views cultural differences in terms of differences in political beliefs which concern the non-political sphere. He expects, therefore, that by excluding the truth of such beliefs from the political agenda, all citizens would find his principles of justice as fairness reasonable and, consequently, would join his overlapping consensus. By failing to see the nature of such differences and the extent to which cultural communities may differ from each other, and the close (sometimes even indistinguishable) relation of political and non-political aspects within some cultures, not only many cultures which hold non-liberal doctrines, but even many liberal doctrines within the liberal culture (e.g. Hobbesian) are excluded from his proposed consensus.

Second, he assumes that, at least so far as politics is

concerned. western liberal democracies are culturally homogenised. Therefore, he appeals time and again to shared understandings, the existence of which is questionable.

The third main objection rests on difficulties with that part of Rawls's argument which suggests that pluralism is peculiar to modern democracies and that it is a valuable characteristic of their culture. It has been argued that there are historical evidence about the existence of plural societies in the past, though they may not be described as liberal societies. Also, it has been shown that the desirability of such plurality is itself open to question which, at least, undermines the force of this argument.

## CHAPTER 8

### RAZ: A THEORY OF LIBERAL PERFECTIONISM

The impossibility of the neutrality of the liberal state has been discussed in the previous chapter. As we mentioned there, there are liberal thinkers who suggests further that even if such a thing was possible, there are good reasons why it would be undesirable. They argue for a perfectionist state which provides the necessary conditions so that liberal values can be fulfilled. An outstanding example of this group of liberal thinkers is Joseph Raz whose *Morality of Freedom* has reinforced the theoretical framework for such a perfectionist liberalism which holds that states can and should act upon judgements about the relative merits of the different conceptions of the good espoused by their citizens.<sup>1</sup> In section 1 his discussion about the undesirability of political neutrality will be explored. In section 2 I shall explain his idea of a perfectionist state. Both sections 1 and 2, therefore, are in a way concerned with his account of the foundation of political morality. More importantly in this respect, however, is his theory of autonomy-based freedom which reveals more explicitly his account of political morality as well as his conception of the self. This will be explored in section 3. In section 4 his recent

---

<sup>1</sup> J. Raz. *The Morality of Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

argument about multiculturalism will be presented. In section 5, a conclusion to the arguments of this chapter is offered.

## **1. The Undesirability of Political Neutrality**

We saw in the previous chapter that liberal thinkers like Rawls maintain that the state should be neutral towards different conceptions of the good. They argue that it is necessary that individuals' choice of conception of the good life is protected from the state interference. As I have shown, however, Rawls's proposed liberal idea of political neutrality is based on assumptions which are specific to the liberal tradition and, therefore, incapable of providing the supposedly neutral ground required for political decision making in multicultural societies. It is not, however, the only possible objection to political neutrality since many others have criticised the idea from different viewpoints. Among these critics, Raz's argument about neutrality is significant for at least three reasons: first, because of the careful analysis of the problem he provides. Second, he shows that not only neutrality is not possible but that even if it was, it would not be desired by a liberal state. The third reason why his criticism is distinctive is that, unlike the communitarian critique, his criticism does not undermine other liberal conceptions such as the conception of autonomy.

It was mentioned in the previous chapter that although some contemporary liberal theorists like Rawls argue for the neutrality of the state, there is no agreement between them on the content of the idea. Raz begins his analysis by exploring these disagreements. An important divergence concerns the scope of neutrality. For some, neutrality is concerned with each person's chances to carry out the ideal of the good he happens to espouse. Others develop this into a more radical form and argue that neutrality concerns the probability that a person will adopt one conception of the good rather than another. It is the latter which represents the notion which is adopted by most advocates of political neutrality. Another ambiguity concerns the level of neutrality. There are theorists who hold that neutrality applies only to the constitution whereas others argue for a generally neutral politics and that individuals can alternatively pursue their conceptions of the good by non-political means.

In addition to such divergence on the scope and level of neutrality, there is a diversity in the interpretation of political neutrality. Raz distinguishes three different views. The first view holds that political actions should neither promote a particular ideal of the good nor enable individuals to pursue an ideal of the good. The second account rejects the taking of any political action if it affects the choice of the individual in such a way that he or she endorses one conception of the good rather than

another unless other actions cancel such effects. The third view argues that governments should provide equal opportunity for all persons to pursue their ideal of the good.

Raz argues that the first interpretation, offered by Robert Nozick, is not actually an account of neutrality for the following reason: Nozick maintains that not every enforcement of a prohibition which differently benefits people makes the state non-neutral. According to Nozick, a prohibition against rape, for instance, cannot be considered as non-neutral since it is justified by an independent reason, even though it affects different people (e.g. the would-be rapist and one without such an intention) differently. Raz rightly argues that such an argument rests on the view that so long as one is not acting for the reason that one's action will favour one of the parties or hinder the other, but for a valid independent reason, then one's neutrality is intact. If, then, a valid independent reason can justify such actions as neutral, the prospect of a profit is equally a valid reason for most commercial activities and, therefore, selling arms to one of the combatants in a conflict for profit does not jeopardise one's neutrality. Raz concludes that Nozick's state is not neutral and his principle is not a principle of neutrality, but it shares with the doctrine of neutrality an anti-perfectionist bias.

Raz calls the second account the principle of narrow (political) neutrality in order to distinguish it from the third

interpretation which suggests comprehensive (political) neutrality. The former consists in helping or hindering the parties to an equal degree in those activities and regarding those resources that they would wish neither to engage in nor to acquire but for the conflict, whereas the latter consists in helping or hindering them in all matters relevant to the conflict. Raz maintains that narrow neutrality is often all that is meant by neutrality. Raz offers two arguments against comprehensive neutrality as adopted by theorists like Rawls. First, he argues, "[n]eutrality is concerned only with the degree to which the parties are helped or hindered. It is silent concerning acts which neither help nor hinder".<sup>2</sup> But valuing neutrality presupposes a distinction between not helping and hindering, as well as between helping and hindering. Such distinctions, however, are neither always of moral significance nor in all cases possible. The example which Raz provides runs as follows. Consider a country (C) that has no commercial or other relations with either of two warring parties (A and B), but may have been able to establish links with either of them. It would be said that C was not neutral unless the help it could have and did not give A was equal to the help that it could have and did not give B. But suppose that C could have supplied both A and B with a commodity that was in short supply in A but not in B. Should we say that C is not neutral unless it starts providing A that commodity? It should be

---

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p.120.

considered as such if by not helping C is hindering it. But according to the common understanding of neutrality, C would have been breaking its neutrality if in such circumstances it had started supplying one of the parties with militarily useful materials after the outbreak of hostilities.

In his second argument Raz imagines two parties (A and B) fighting each other, and C which has no commercial or other relations with A, but supplies B with essential food which helps them maintain their war effort. Suppose that C wants to be neutral. But if C continues supplying B, it will be helping it more than A; and if C discontinues supplies, it will be hindering B more than A. Raz then raises the question whether the state can be neutral even in the narrow sense:

The conflict in which the state is supposed to be neutral is about the ability of people to choose and successfully pursue conceptions of the good (and these include ideals of the good society or world). It is therefore a comprehensive conflict. There is nothing outside it which can be useful for it but it is not specifically necessary for it. The whole life, so to speak, is involved in the pursuit of the good life. Can one be narrowly neutral in a comprehensive conflict?<sup>3</sup>

The principle of neutrality, therefore, has to be understood in a comprehensive sense. The result is that "the state can be neutral only if it creates conditions of equal opportunities for

---

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.123-124.



people to choose any conception of the good, with an equal prospect of realizing it".<sup>4</sup>

After clarifying the principle of neutrality, Raz turns to its evaluation. Since Rawls suggests the comprehensive neutrality of the state, Raz concentrates mainly on his argument. As discussed in the previous chapter, Rawls argues that the role of a theory of justice is that citizens can justify to one another their common institutions. Raz points out, however, that the fact of the plurality of the conceptions of the good does not necessarily mean that within a particular culture there are no common elements in their varying conceptions. These common elements need not be excluded by the veil of ignorance. Moreover, Rawls fails to see that the social role of a theory of justice may be met by a consensus on the second best. In this case, people may choose an alternative on which all members of the society can agree. Different ideals of the good, therefore, do not need to be excluded from the process of reasoning about the doctrine of justice and a unanimous conclusion may be reached by different means: "the common feature of most routes will be the reliance on a rational reconstruction of a process of bargaining by which the common overriding goal of reaching an agreement leads the parties to compromise by accepting a less than perfect doctrine as the optimally realizable second best".<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> ibid. p.124.

<sup>5</sup> ibid. p.129.

This line of argument against the idea of political neutrality seems plausible. Although the assessment of Raz's discussion in support of a liberal perfectionist state has to wait until the last section of this chapter, two important points about the above argument should be noted here: first, that, unlike Rawls, Raz is not concerned with the distinction between the private and the public or the political and non-political. Indeed, as will be shown in the next section, his interpretation of the conception of the good concerns both of these spheres, though in a particular sense. It does not mean that he denies possible doubts on the viability of such distinctions, something he mentions himself. Rather, his defence of liberalism does not need to be involved in drawing such distinctions. The second point is that in suggesting an alternative approach to the role of justice, like Rawls, he presupposes a given culture which is shared by all members of the society, since, as will be shown later in this chapter, he regards the liberal conception of autonomy as the universal ground of agreement. It is on this presupposition that he wishes that people may be able to find a common ground for a unanimous agreement. The existence of such a common culture, however, is open to question: a problem which will be discussed later in this chapter.

## 2. A Defence of Perfectionism

So far a trend of anti-perfectionism which is based on the idea of neutrality has been discussed. According to it, governments are to be impartial towards all rival moralities. The other line of argument against perfectionism is based on the principle of the exclusion of the conceptions of the good. But what, exactly, is meant by such conceptions in the political arena? Raz defines them as “[a]ny judgment that an activity, way of life, or any aspect of it is either good or bad to any degree”.<sup>6</sup> They compass, therefore, both private ideals and societal conditions which contribute to them. What the principle of the exclusion of ideas claims is that the implementation of that part of morality which concerns the ideal of the good life is not a legitimate object of governmental action. The reason is that the supporters of this principle maintain that the state cannot be perfectionist unless it uses coercive means in doing so. Raz’s main task, therefore, is to show that not all types of coercion undermine the autonomy of the individual: a discussion which, I believe, is the most important theme of *The Morality of Freedom*. Raz puts the question as follows: “Is there anything about coercion or its political use to justify anti-perfectionism?”<sup>7</sup> His starting point on this matter is to clarify the notion of coercion. He claims that although the term

---

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 135.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 148.

has a fixed descriptive core, its meaning is to be worked out through its moral significance. But there is no general agreement in the linguistic community on the precise evaluative significance of coercion. Therefore, “[w]hichever view one takes, it is not to be justified on linguistic or conceptual grounds but by the soundness of the moral theory of which it is a part”.<sup>8</sup> Then Raz suggests two principles which state the evaluative significance of coercion regarding the acts of the coercer and the coerced:

(i) By issuing a coercive threat to another person one invades his autonomy.

(ii) The fact that a person acted under coercion is either a justification or a complete excuse for his action.<sup>9</sup>

The question which arises, is how serious need a threat be to be considered as a coercive one? Raz answer is that “[i]f it would justify a coerced action, its seriousness depends on the reasons against that action. If those are not very weighty, the threat need not be as serious as a threat to a personal need”.<sup>10</sup> But if it is of great weight, the coerced is made to act against his will in a certain way and his or her autonomy has been invaded. However, autonomy is a matter of degree and Raz rightly argues that it is possible only within a framework of constraints since “[t]he

---

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p.150.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p.150.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. pp.153-154.

completely autonomous person is an impossibility".<sup>11</sup> The important implication of this discussion is that:

Inasmuch as the liberal concern to limit coercion is a concern for the autonomy of persons, the liberal will also be anxious to secure natural and social conditions which enable individuals to develop an autonomous life. ... In pursuing such goals the liberal may be willing to use coercion.<sup>12</sup>

Now if coercive actions are evaluated by the consequences they bring about and if coercion used for a good purpose, like securing the conditions of an autonomous life, is justified, what makes the use of coercion justified for liberals and not for others? Raz replies to this question by arguing that the use of coercion by an ideal liberal state is significantly different because "individuals are guaranteed adequate rights of political participation in the liberal state and since such a state is guided by a public morality expressing concern for individual autonomy, its coercive measures do not express an insult to the autonomy of individuals".<sup>13</sup>

The first reason is open to an important question: if coercion is justified on the ground of citizens' right of political participation, it would be justified in all forms of state which allow (or even require) citizens' participation and not only in

---

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*, p. 155.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.* p. 156

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.* pp. 156-157

liberal states. Otherwise, Raz should be able to show that political participation is specific to liberalism and not to the democratic thought in general; or that liberalism is distinguishable from other strands within the democratic tradition in demanding the maximisation of participation; or, more generally, that democracy is an integrated part of liberalism. None of these claims, however, can be established without difficulty; not only is the demand for widespread political participation not specific to liberals but many critics have shown the inadequacy of liberal theories in this concern and condemned the narrowness of the liberal conception of participation as the result of its atomist individualism and the narrowness of the conception of the politics it holds.<sup>14</sup> Although political participation is certainly the most significant feature of democratic thought (though not specific to it) and liberals have been among the significant proponents of democracy, it is not peculiar to the liberal state.

The second reason is also open to question: is autonomy a value which is valued only by liberalism? Or is it the case that liberalism holds a particular interpretation of autonomy? This particularity derives from two sources: (i) the contents of the notion, and (ii) its status among other values, and, as a result, the limits which are imposed upon it by these values. This leads us to Raz's discussion of autonomy and political freedom which is the

---

<sup>14</sup> See for example C. Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970).

subject of the next section. But before turning to it, there are two other points which Raz makes about perfectionism and are worth mentioning here. The first point is that the value which is attributed to anti-perfectionism is based on a practical and moral confusion. On the practical side it is assumed that perfectionist action is necessarily an action by one group against another. However, it need not be so and perfectionist political action may be supported unanimously by the whole community. Moreover, it is thought that all perfectionist action is a coercive imposition of a particular style of life. Raz argues that a perfectionist political action can be performed by encouraging and facilitating some and discouraging other modes of behaviour. The moral confusion is concerned with whether perfectionism is compatible with moral pluralism. This discussion will be explored in the next section since it is an essential premise for his autonomy-based theory of political freedom.

Raz also believes that to support a valuable form of life is a social rather than an individual matter since “[i]t requires a culture which recognizes it, and which supports it through the public’s attitude and through its formal institutions”.<sup>15</sup> He concludes that “[a]nti-perfectionism in practice would lead not merely to a political stand-off from support for valuable conceptions of the good. It would undermine the chances of

---

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*, p.162.

survival of many cherished aspects of our culture".<sup>16</sup>

While most parts of the above discussion are convincing, his account of encouragement and discouragement as non-coercive actions seems less evidently so, since it implies, as Raz discusses in his book, that governmental actions like taxing certain activities and subsidising others should not be regarded as coercive, but mere discouragement or encouragement. But if a person ceases to do what he does as a consequence of the high taxes which he or she has to pay for it, how far is it adequate to regard this person as not being coerced? Here the coercion may not be as strong as many other cases, but it is still coercion. Raz's other argument seems to be more adequate since it evaluates coercion through its consequences rather than searching for a formulation which is based on the content of the term itself. It is not coercion itself, but the purpose for which it has been used, which justifies a coercive action. In the light of such problems, the distinction between encouragement or discouragement and coercion seems of less use in justifying perfectionist actions.

### **3. The Value of Autonomy**

It is time now to turn to the argument of autonomy which is the central scheme of Raz's project in offering his autonomy-based theory of freedom and is relevant to our first theme, i.e.

---

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* p.162.



the concept of the self. He argues that the ideal of autonomy “transcends the conceptual point that personal well-being is partly determined by success in willingly endorsed pursuits and holds the free choice of goals and relations as an essential ingredient of individual well-being”.<sup>17</sup> An important precondition of having an autonomous life, therefore, is the availability of options. But these options should be adequate: “[t]hey should include options with long term pervasive consequences as well as short term options of little consequences, and a fair spread in between”.<sup>18</sup> Such adequacy is partly due to the variety (and not the number) of options available. A question which comes to mind is whether autonomy so defined is valuable in itself. Raz rightly replies that an action cannot be of value merely because it is performed autonomously, since an autonomous wrongdoer, for instance, is not a morally better person than a non-autonomous wrongdoer. It follows that the availability of evil options is not a requirement of respect for autonomy. “Autonomy”, he writes, “is valuable only if exercised in pursuit of the good. The ideal of autonomy requires only the availability of morally acceptable options”.<sup>19</sup> Another question is whether to choose to be autonomous is itself one of such options. Raz does not offer any answer to this but insists that if a person does choose to be autonomous, then it becomes one of his or her goals and can

---

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* p.369

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* p.374.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* p.381.

contribute to his or her well-being.

As we saw in the previous section, an important departure of Raz's account of liberalism from that of the neutralists is his insistence on the effects of the cultural environment within which one lives on the way one conducts one's life. For those who live in an autonomy-supporting environment there is no other way to prosper than the choices they make from the available adequate range of options. This directs the argument into the problem of pluralism. For Raz, the plurality of valuable conceptions of the good is the precondition for an autonomous life since, unless there are variable options for people to choose from, one cannot speak of the freedom of choice. But the mere existence of a plurality of incompatible but morally acceptable forms of life is not enough because "[m]oral pluralism not merely claims that incompatible forms of life are morally acceptable but that they display distinct virtues, each capable of being pursued for its own sake".<sup>20</sup> He calls it 'weak moral pluralism' and argues that it is all that valuing autonomy commits one to.

Is autonomy, so defined, a specifically liberal argument and does it display the spirit of the liberal approach to politics? Raz aims to explore this view. One possible account, as we saw, argues for an anti-perfectionist liberal state which avoids pursuing any particular conception of the good. We saw both the impossibility and undesirability of this approach. Another

---

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.* p.396.

account, rooted in the more traditional view of the liberal thought, bases freedom on the harm principle. According to this account, the only justified use of coercive power is to prevent harm. However, pain, offence and hurt are harmful only when they affect options or projects. Millian at heart, Raz wants to go further and offer a different understanding of this principle which suggests that it is “derivable from a morality which regards personal autonomy as an essential ingredient of the good life, and regards the principle of autonomy, which imposes duties on people to secure for all the conditions of autonomy, as one of the most important moral principles”.<sup>21</sup> In order to do this, he argues that “[i]t is a mistake to think that the harm principle recognizes only the duty of governments to prevent loss of autonomy. Sometimes failing to improve the situation of another is harming him”.<sup>22</sup> Such interpretation leads to a utilitarian perfectionism by which the restriction of autonomy of some for the sake of the greater autonomy of others is justified.

An important implication of this account concerns the problem of multicultural societies, which is the main subject of the present study.<sup>23</sup> According to Raz, while the dominant public culture of western industrial societies respects the principles of autonomy as described above. “[o]ne particular troubling

---

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p.415.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.415- 416.

<sup>23</sup> In fact, it is not irrelevant to suggest that Raz’s goal is to provide the necessary justificatory grounds for dealing with this problem.

problem concerns the treatment of communities whose culture does not support autonomy".<sup>24</sup> Does the harm principle defend such immigrant communities, indigenous people and religious sects, assuming that their culture is morally worthy and provides the members of the society an adequate and satisfying life? Raz argues that such a question arises for those who believe that illiberal cultures are inferior to their liberal culture. Raz's perfectionist principles suggest, as he himself mentions, that taking action to assimilate the minority group is justified, even "at the cost of letting its culture die or at least be considerably changed by absorption".<sup>25</sup> Although the principle of toleration requires that these cultural communities be tolerated, assimilation is still considered as the only way. Raz believes that the gradual transformation of these minority communities is different from their precipitate disintegration. Thus, so long as they are viable communities offering acceptable prospects to their members, including their young, they should be allowed to continue in their ways. But many of them are not self-sustaining. Often it is clear that they cannot be expected to survive for long as an isolated group in a modern society:

Sometimes they survive as a dwindling community through the forceful stand of some of their members who sometimes combine with misguided liberals and conservatives to condemn many of the

---

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*, p.423

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.* p.424.

young in such communities to an impoverished, unrewarding life by denying them the education and the opportunities to thrive outside the community. In such cases assimilationist policies may well be the only humane course, even if implemented by force of law.<sup>26</sup>

I have quoted the above relatively long paragraph because it contains points which are of importance to the concern of the present inquiry.

First of all, on many occasions, Raz talks about a culture which is shared in western societies. But does such a shared culture really exist? And if it does, to what extent is it shared? Certainly there are many beliefs on which the dominant majority in the west are agreed, but, as discussed in chapter 5, even within such majority there are other traditions which do not agree with liberals on many grounds. As Bhikhu Parekh argues, who this homogenized 'we' refers to is not clear. It excludes the illiberal cultures which evidently have no say in deciding how they should be treated. Furthermore, it excludes a large body of non-liberal opinion within the West itself which cherishes the religiosity and communal way of life of the immigrant and hopes that they will deepen and enrich the morality and spiritually shallow dominant way of life. Raz's 'we' largely refers to liberals, and shows that, like Mill, he regards liberalism as the sole authentic voice of

---

<sup>26</sup> *ibid*, p.424.

Western history.<sup>27</sup>

Moreover, Raz's discussion assumes the idea that communities other than the liberal's are necessarily against an autonomous way of life. However, they need not be so. This assumption stems from a confusion of non-liberal and illiberal moral or religious doctrines. The British Muslim community, for instance, cannot be viewed as liberal, but this does not mean that it is against individual autonomy in any sense. It is more accurate to say that their conception of autonomy is different from the liberal concept. Such a difference is for the most part concerned with the limits of autonomy which, compared to the liberal concept, are drawn differently. What the former term shows is that a doctrine does not respect autonomy in the way that liberalism does, whereas the latter term characterises other doctrines as opposed to autonomy in whatever way it is perceived. There may be some moral or religious doctrines entirely in opposition to autonomy in any form and any degree, though I am not aware of such doctrines. But this is rarely the case for ethnic minorities criticised above and it is unlikely that Raz has them in mind here.

The fact is that many non-liberal cultures respect autonomy, although in ways which differ from the liberal approach. It is important to explain a little more about this point.

---

<sup>27</sup> B. Parekh, 'Superior people: The narrowness of liberalism from Mill to Rawls', *TLS* February 25, 1994.

What is at stake here is that philosophical concepts can be interpreted from different viewpoints and, accordingly, can play different roles in different moral doctrines. Moral concepts may have different interpretations. The clarification of such concepts has two tasks: analytically, we aim to specify their elements through their definitions; and synthetically, we study their relationships with other concepts.<sup>28</sup> The former task involves us mainly with the contents of the notion, whereas the latter concerns its status among other values. These two tasks, however, are not independent: each of them affects the other in a reflective way. In addition, for the same reason, one concept affects and is affected by other concepts. An ontological example may illustrate such reflections. The conception of Man is a well known argument of this kind. Some regard him as a being trapped by Nature, others see him as the master of the world, and there can be other views ranged between these two groups. Now, when the relationship between Man and gods or the God is questioned, the way Man's relationship with Nature is observed both affects and is affected by the way his relationship with gods or the God is seen.

Thus, the definition of a concept affects its relationship with other concepts, and vice versa. They can altogether be recognised as a system of, say, morality. What often differentiates

---

<sup>28</sup> I borrowed these terms from D. D. Raphael's *Problems of Political Philosophy* (London: Macmillan, 1976) p.12, though I employ them in a slightly different way.

the liberal view of morality from others, therefore, is the way concepts are composed. Such a composition, of course, is hierarchical in the sense that some concepts are more influential than others, subject to the status they enjoy in the whole system. Accordingly, ontological concepts play naturally a more influential role in a system or tradition of thought. The conception of Man, for instance, is influenced by the way the relations between the individual and the society, the person and Nature, and Man and God are viewed.

We can return now to our discussion about autonomy. Contrary to what Raz claims, what often differentiates the morality which liberal culture holds from other (non-liberal) cultures is not that the latter do not support autonomy, but that they respect autonomy differently. They may even regard 'personal autonomy as an essential ingredient of the good life' too, but still view autonomy in a different way. For some traditions, autonomy may be regarded as a departure point where our lives as human beings starts, but not as a point where we end. One may hold that autonomy is an essential precondition for living as a human being, yet autonomously accept the restrictions which the divine law imposes on his autonomy. Liberals cannot accuse him of rejecting the value of autonomy considering that perfect autonomy, according to Raz, is impossible and autonomy is a matter of degree. In fact, such a person may view his life as



more autonomous. since he believes that by accepting those restrictions, he has achieved the autonomous life in a truer sense.

It seems to me that Gerald Dworkin pursues a similar line of argument when he maintains that “[a]utonomy is a term of art introduced by a theorist in an attempt to make sense of a tangled net of intuitions, conceptual and empirical issues, and normative claims. What one needs, therefore, is a study of how the term is connected with other notions, what role it plays in justifying various normative claims, how the notion is supposed to ground ascriptions of value, and so on- in short, a theory”.<sup>29</sup> It follows, then, that “various ideologies may differ greatly on the weight to be attached to the value of autonomy, the trade-offs that are reasonable, whether the value be intrinsic, instrumental, and so forth.”<sup>30</sup>

This does not suggest relativism. It is not to say that since moral concepts are understood differently in different traditions, all traditions are necessarily incommensurable. We may reasonably criticise one tradition and show, for example, that some of its moral claims are internally inconsistent or that its whole system is incoherent. We may also consider some traditions value a principle like autonomy as more acceptable than others. Moreover, there may be (and I believe there actually

---

<sup>29</sup> G. Dworkin, *The Theory and Practice of Autonomy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p.7.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p.8.

are) moral principles on which all traditions of thought can fundamentally agree. A rational dialogue between different traditions is not impossible. What the above argument suggests is that moral principles like autonomy can be valued differently by different traditions of thought and it is misguided to claim that cultures are divided into two camps: the supporters of autonomy as understood by liberals like Mill and Raz, and those which do not support autonomy as a fundamental moral principle. It is not, therefore, unreasonable to say that the source of the superiority which the liberals like Raz attribute to liberalism over other traditions of thought is not supported by philosophical reasoning but stems mostly from a kind of ethnocentrism on which their views are based, even though it is hidden behind philosophical discourse.

#### **4. Liberalism and Multiculturalism**

In a recent article, Raz has offered a liberal perspective on multiculturalism.<sup>31</sup> Since multiculturalism is a problem today and is likely to be so for the foreseeable future, for politics and the ethics of politics, he intends here to explore the implications of the liberal political philosophy in which he believes; an outline of which has been offered above. The contextuality of political theory, he argues, presupposes value pluralism and in this

---

<sup>31</sup> J. Raz, 'Multiculturalism: A Liberal Perspective', *Dissent*, Winter 1994.

respect, contemporary liberalism differs from its classical ancestor. As a result, unlike the classical theories of Locke and Kant, contemporary liberal theory acknowledges the importance of community for individual well-being. In this respect, liberal nondiscriminatory theories of rights and discussions which concern the minority rights against majority rule fall too short in capturing the central claims of multiculturalism. Raz believes that:

[M]ulticulturalism emphasizes the importance to political action of two evaluative judgments. First, the belief that individual freedom and prosperity depend on full and unimpeded membership in a respected and flourishing cultural group. Second, a belief in value pluralism, and in particular in the validity of the diverse values embodied in the practices of different societies.<sup>32</sup>

This, of course, is a liberal perspective, a perspective which emphasises the value of freedom to the individual in his being in charge of his life. As shown above, for Raz, this freedom depends on options. Here he develops this further by arguing that options presuppose a culture. By culture he means "shared meanings and common practices".<sup>33</sup> Cultural membership, therefore, is viewed as vitally important to individuals in three ways: First, "[o]nly through being socialized in a culture can one tap the options that

---

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, p.69.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, p.70.

give life a meaning".<sup>34</sup> Second, is "the fact that a common culture facilitates relations and is a condition of rich and comprehensive personal relationship".<sup>35</sup> Finally, cultural membership affects individual well-being. Raz concludes that it is only by referring to such an individualistic account of cultural membership that liberals can support multiculturalism:

Cultural, and other, groups have a life of their own. But their moral claim to respect and to prosperity rests entirely on their importance to the prosperity of individual human beings. This case is a liberal case for it emphasizes culture as a factor that gives shape and content to individual freedom. <sup>36</sup>

He emphasises here that liberal multiculturalism is characteristically non-utopian and that it rejects any commitment to perfectionism and conservatism. It rather see the conflict between and within cultures as endemic.

Raz tries next to provide an argument to answer why cultures should be respected. He first notices that the liberal justification of multiculturalism is humanistic, not theological. Secondly, the liberal support for non-liberal cultures is conditional: "it does so while imposing liberal protections for individual freedom on those cultures".<sup>37</sup> Therefore, "liberal

---

<sup>34</sup> *ibid.*, p.71.

<sup>35</sup> *ibid.*, p.71.

<sup>36</sup> *ibid.*, p.72

<sup>37</sup> *ibid.*, p.74.

multiculturalism recognizes and respects those cultures only to the extent that they serve true values".<sup>38</sup> A third point is that "one's devotion to and love of one's culture in no way depends on believing it to be better than others. It is rational and valid whether or not it is better than others, so long as one loves one's own culture for what is truly good in it".<sup>39</sup>

I begin my criticism from the three points just mentioned and then I shall argue why I think his liberal multiculturalism is actually far from being compatible with the main claims of the recognition of cultural diversity. It should be pointed out at the outset that his claim that the liberal justification of multiculturalism is humanistic rather than theological cannot imply any rational superiority of the former over the latter, if it is meant to. As discussed in chapter 3, different traditions of moral enquiry presuppose different rationality and, considering the fact of untranslatability and incommensurability of cultures, at least sometimes it is impossible to claim one as rationally superior.

Secondly, here again he gives liberalism the power to decide whether a culture can be allowed to be respected in the multicultural society and the power to impose a particular conception of individual freedom on other cultures. This, as argued above, conflicts with the main claim of multiculturalism, namely, the equal recognition of diverse cultures. Since the *true*

---

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, p.74.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, p.75.

*values* which Raz mentioned in this respect turn out to be liberal, his multiculturalism turns out to be too narrow to embrace many non-liberal cultures.

Thirdly, his remark on the relation between one's affection for his culture seems to be unrealistic: how am I to love my culture while I do not regard it as better than others? And on what basis should I make up my mind to choose a culture (as the consequence of the freedom of choice that Raz's liberal multiculturalism provides me) when my choice is not (at least in my eyes) the better?

But apart from these points, his liberal formulation suffers from a deeper problem. Raz's reason for the compatibility of liberalism and multiculturalism is that autonomy (in terms of liberty of individual choice), which should be considered as the most fundamental value of liberalism, calls for the toleration of different cultures with the exception of those in which internal oppression is observed. Such a group is excluded from the suggested mutual toleration since the autonomy of its members is undermined. Oppression, however, can be defined differently from the viewpoints of different cultures and the cultural dependence of this factor undermines the very possibility of the application of Raz's solution. Here again, the *Satanic Verses* affair in Britain provides a good example in this respect. On the one hand, the British Muslim community demanded that the book be

banned, since in accordance with the Islamic law it was considered as blasphemous. On the other hand, the ban was considered as unacceptable by liberals since it would undermine freedom of speech. Raz's formulation, I suppose, would vote for ignoring the Muslims' demand on the ground that it would undermine the principle of autonomy (as interpreted by the liberal culture).

Andrew Mason has discussed this matter as follows: Raz believes that the thesis of his radical individualism is true in relation to an autonomy-supporting culture. But "[i]t is not clear whether this idea could justify giving priority to autonomy whenever it conflicts with community"<sup>40</sup> since "the state of affairs which would then make the thesis of radical individualism true would be one in which priority has *already* been given to autonomy and the autonomous life by providing an environment that *uniformly* supports autonomous life-styles and discourages non-autonomous ones".<sup>41</sup> Moreover, "[w]ithin a society that provides an autonomy supporting environment, there may be groups which have traditions and customs that suppress autonomy. These groups may place their own meanings on the 'options' that are provided by the dominant culture".<sup>42</sup> Mason concludes, that the truth involved in radical individualism is

---

<sup>40</sup> A. Mason, 'Liberalism and the Value of Community', *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 23, No.2, June 1993, p.236.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, pp.236-237.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, p.237.

insufficient to justify giving priority to autonomy whenever it conflicts with community. A person, therefore, can lead a life that is autonomous to a large extent, even when some options are ruled out for him because allowing individuals to choose them would threaten to undermine communal relations. Someone who is prevented from ridiculing a religion that other members of the same community practice need not be prevented from leading a life that is autonomous in its broad outlines. Thus, even if radical individualism is true, it does not provide sufficient reason always to trade off threats to community in favour of protecting and promoting the exercise of autonomy.<sup>43</sup>

Therefore, when it comes to non-liberal cultures, the liberal multiculturalism of Raz would tend to use assimilatory means rather than recognising the existing cultural diversity. Two conclusions can be drawn from this argument. The first is that Raz's liberal approach is incompatible with multiculturalism. The second is that, considering the untranslatability and incommensurability of cultures, there cannot be any universally acceptable approach at all. My argument, I hope, has provided grounds for accepting the first. The second is a discussion which I will be argued briefly in chapter 10.

## **5. Conclusion**

---

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.* pp.238-239.



So far as the concept of the self is concerned, Raz's argument reveals a position which is very close to that of the communitarians. Although personal autonomy is the most important value for him, it does not prevent him from acknowledging the importance of the social matrix in this connection since, for him, personal well-being depends on social forms. However, this does not mean that communal life enjoys the same significance as it has for communitarians, since the contribution of social matrix is viewed as the necessary environment within which the person can make his or her choice and pursue his or her end. Therefore, unlike communitarians, Raz does not argue that one's community is wholly constitutive of one's identity. For him, cultures are important to individuals since they provide the range of choice which is the precondition of autonomous life.

This shows that the liberal state cannot and should not be neutral:

[T]he autonomy principle is a perfectionist principle. Autonomous life is valuable only if it is spent in the pursuit of acceptable and valuable projects and relationships. The autonomy principle permits and even requires governments to create morally valuable opportunities, and to eliminate repugnant ones.<sup>44</sup>

---

<sup>44</sup> Raz, *The Morality of Freedom*, p.417.

His argument against (procedural or consequential) neutrality seems to be strong enough to rebut claims of anti-perfectionism.

What can be viewed as his account of the foundation of political morality? Raz acknowledges moral pluralism and, as argued above, for him, the plurality of valuable conceptions of the good is the precondition for autonomous life since it provides varied options for people to choose. Such a pluralism, however, does not commit him to relativism since the value of the various conceptions of life can be judged by appealing to independent criteria. On the basis of the possibility of making value judgments about conceptions, some (and not all) are viewed as valuable. In other words, for Raz, a people's well-being does not depend upon their living a life they believe to be of value, but upon their living a life which is valuable for reasons independent of the belief in its value.

This indicates also the limits of political toleration in Raz's theory. His Millian account does not allow many non-liberal cultures to be included in his perfectionist politics. It is mainly here, as argued above, that his liberal theory of state seems problematic. Since he classifies cultures as liberal (which support autonomy) and illiberal (which in his view do not allow autonomy), the latter are subject to assimilation. However, as argued in this chapter, the fact that non-liberal cultures differ in their conceptions of autonomy from the liberal does not mean

that they are necessarily against autonomy. In order to show non-liberal cultures as inferior, Raz needs to show that the liberal concept of autonomy is superior to other concepts, an argument which he has not offered.

## CHAPTER 9

### KYMLICKA: A LIBERAL THEORY OF CULTURAL MEMBERSHIP

Of the three liberal theorists who have been chosen to be discussed here, Will Kymlicka is more explicitly and to a greater extent concerned with the problem of cultural diversity than the other two. The way he approaches the problem seems to provide a defensible account of liberalism against the communitarian critique. Since among his publications, *Liberalism, Community and Culture* and *Multicultural Citizenship* are more important with respect to cultural diversity. I shall mainly concentrate on them in the sections of this chapter.<sup>1</sup>

Kymlicka believes that cultural membership is of fundamental importance to personal well-being and individuals are to be free to choose and pursue their conception of the good life. Thus he does not agree with Rawls on state neutrality of aim. Yet he does not agree either with Raz that the necessity of public support for cultural structure requires some public ranking of the intrinsic merits of competing conceptions of the good. Instead, as will be shown in section 1, he adopts an indirect

---

<sup>1</sup> W. Kymlicka, *Liberalism, Community and Culture* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989); W. Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

perfectionism through the exploration of which his accounts of the foundation of political morality will be brought into focus. The subject of section 2 is his discussion of choice and revisability which is concerned with his conception of the self. His account of political morality and conception of the self together suggest some limits of the liberal political toleration in multicultural societies which will attract our attention in section 3. Finally, in section 4 a conclusion on his position towards the politics of cultural diversity will be presented.

### **1. Cultural Membership as a Primary Good**

As mentioned above, Kymlicka's aim is to produce a defence of liberalism as a political philosophy against the communitarian critique. Kymlicka believes that, in addition to several misinterpretations of liberalism in the debate between these two groups, liberalism has suffered from "the absence of a systematic discussion of the liberal accounts of community and culture".<sup>2</sup> Such a discussion should answer questions concerning the idea of cultural membership and its nature, the meaning and extent of individuals' cultural identity, and the legitimacy of ensuring the continuation of cultures.

Since liberalism has been represented by different accounts, Kymlicka indicates that the sort of liberalism he wants to defend

---

<sup>2</sup> Kymlicka, *Liberalism, Community and Culture*, p.1.

is not any one specific account, but rather, what liberalism as a normative political philosophy *can* say in response to objections related to cultural membership. However, while he is not concerned with what particular liberals actually said in the past, the account of liberalism he defends is to a great extent sympathetic to the political philosophy of modern liberals like J. S. Mill, Rawls (as represented in *Theory of Justice*) and Dworkin.

Kymlicka begins his discussion by underlining the importance of our essential interest in leading a good life. He then argues that there are two preconditions for the fulfilment of such an interest: that we lead our lives from within; and that we should be free to question and revise our beliefs about what gives value to life. Together, they represent the basis of liberal political theory. Each theory, therefore, must give an account of what people's interests are, most comprehensively conceived, and an account of what follows from supposing that these interests matter equally:

According to liberalism, since our most essential interest is getting these beliefs right and acting on them, government treats people as equals, with equal concern and respect, by providing for each individual the liberties and resources needed to examine and act on these beliefs. This requirement forms the basis of contemporary liberal theories of justice.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.* c.13.

This freedom to examine our ends from inside is only valuable if we can pursue them. "but it is not equivalent to the freedom to lead our lives from the inside".<sup>4</sup> It is this moral capacity for revising our ends which is the cornerstone of Kymlicka's liberalism and on which he builds his strategy of defending contemporary liberal theory. In fact, as we will see later, Kymlicka aims to show us that this power of revisability is unique to liberalism or at least that liberal theories have a stronger position on this matter than their communitarian rivals.

Having discussed the sort of liberalism he is interested to defend, Kymlicka then examines some objections made by Rawls in the *Theory* against utilitarianism and perfectionism. The latter is of more concern to us here. We have seen that Rawls argues that perfectionists demand that resources should be distributed in ways that encourage the development of the defined human perfection. Consequently, peoples' freedom to choose their conception of the good is restricted since certain conceptions would be penalised or discriminated against. We also saw that Rawls's basis for such criticism is his belief that the right should be given priority over the good. Kymlicka argues that Rawls's argument is actually based on a specific account of the good in terms of one's freedom to revise his or her end. He points out that Rawls does not favour the distribution of primary goods out of a concern for the right rather than the good: "[H]e just has a

---

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.* p.19

different account of what our good is, of what promotes our essential interests, and hence of what it means to give equal weight to each person's interests".<sup>5</sup> Kymlicka concludes that "Rawls and a perfectionist do not disagree over the relative priority of the right and the good. They just disagree over how best to define and promote people's good".<sup>6</sup> Moreover, contrary to Rawls' belief that perfectionism always aims at maximising a particular conception of the good and hence ignores equal consideration for individuals, there are perfectionist theories which hold that it will be unfair to sacrifice one person's pursuit of the good to achieve the maximisation of their preferred good. Liberalism, therefore, is not necessarily against all kinds of perfectionism. The freedom of choice, of being free to choose a conception of good life and examine and revise it at any time, is a good which liberalism does pursue.

Yet he does not agree with Raz that appealing to perfectionist ideals is unavoidable. Kymlicka argues that while Raz claims that the necessity of public support for the cultural structure requires some controversial public ranking of the intrinsic merits of competing conceptions of the good, his argument relies on the non-controversial value of a secure cultural pluralism for people in developing their varying conceptions of the good. Therefore, "there is no reason to

---

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. p.35.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. p.35.



suppose that governments couldn't develop a decision procedure for public support of the culture of freedom that respected the principle of neutral concern".<sup>7</sup>

What kind of neutrality and perfectionism, then, does he suggest? Kymlicka's commitment to state neutrality leads him to adopt an indirect perfectionism which argues that although the state should be neutral towards different conceptions of the good, it should ensure the sort of freedom which is needed in choosing one's conception of life and revising that conception at any time. Interestingly, Ronald Dworkin has made the same suggestion in his article, 'Can a Liberal State Support Art?'.<sup>8</sup> While in his other works he has argued that the liberal state should be neutral in operation as between its citizens' views about what kinds of life are valuable for themselves, when he is dealing with the issue whether the state can support the arts, his argument seems to violate such a neutrality of operation since here, Dworkin argues that the state is responsible for the culture within which people make their choices.<sup>9</sup> For him, culture has two distinguishable consequences for citizens. First, it provides the particular cultural products; and second, it provides what he calls the structural aspect of the general culture, i.e. the frame that makes aesthetic values of that sort possible.<sup>10</sup> The protection of

---

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p.81

<sup>8</sup> R. Dworkin, 'Can a Liberal State Support Art?' in his *A Matter of Principle* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985).

<sup>9</sup> Cf. R. Dworkin, 'Foundations of Liberal Equality' in G. Petersen (ed.) *The Turner Lectures on Human Values*, Vol. II (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1990), p.228.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p.229.

cultural structures, however, is not involved in forcing anyone to make particular choices within it. As Mulhall and Swift point out, however, it is far from clear that the value-neutral interpretation of cultural richness is what Dworkin has in mind, since his formulation of the argument explicitly suggests that the background culture should contain those opportunities and examples that have been thought to be part of living well by reflective people in the past and this implies that "he cannot define what he means by a 'rich and diverse' culture without invoking past judgment about the worth of specific cultural products. If so, then he cannot even specify his avowed aim without implicitly endorsing evaluations of a kind concerning which he appears to claim neutrality."<sup>11</sup> It should be pointed out that Kymlicka's argument for the neutrality of the liberal state is open to the same criticism since, as will be observed later, in his early works his approach to accommodating cultural diversity within liberalism appeals to this Dworkinian argument about cultural structure, though he ceases to employ it in his later writings as he realises the difficulties it faces.

Secondly, his indirect perfectionism seems to be inconsistent with his idea of revisability. As will be shown shortly, he argues that the value of revising one's beliefs about the good is instrumental, deriving from its role in helping one live a life that

---

<sup>11</sup> S. Mulhall and A. Swift, *Liberals and Communitarians* (2nd ed.) (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), p.303.

is on other grounds good. As Thomas Hurka points out, revision has this value only when it will have this particular effect. If I have false or inadequate beliefs about the good, and revision would lead me to replace them with true beliefs, I have an interest in revision. It may switch me from less good activities to ones that are better. But if my current beliefs about the good are true, and revision would replace them with false beliefs, revision would do me harm. Thus, “[i]f in these circumstances the state discourages me from revising my beliefs, either coercively or non-coercively, it does me good”.<sup>12</sup> However, since Kymlicka does not endorse state perfectionism but defends state neutrality, his abstraction from particular claims about value leads him “to suggest that revision in general is good, rather than only revision towards, and not away from, true beliefs. And it invites the simple worry that a state may have false beliefs”.<sup>13</sup>

Thirdly, the kind of neutrality that Kymlicka suggests seems to be similar to what, as mentioned in chapter 1, has been called by Parekh cultural *laissez-faire* which extends the liberal principle of choice and competition to the realm of culture since he has argued that,

liberal neutrality ... allow[s] each group to pursue and advertise its way of life, and those ways of life that are unworthy will have difficulty attracting

---

<sup>12</sup> T. Hurka, 'Indirect Perfectionism: Kymlicka on Liberal Neutrality', *The Journal of Political Philosophy*, Vol. 3, No.1, March 1995, pp. 52.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p.52.

adherents. Since individuals are free to choose between competing visions of the good life, liberal neutrality creates a marketplace of ideas, as it were, and how well a way of life does in this market depends on the kinds of goods it can offer to prospective adherents.<sup>14</sup>

Simon Caney has pointed out, however, that “[t]he chief problem with this argument lies in the assumption that valuable forms when confronted with worthless forms will prevail” while “we have no reason to think that the most valuable ideals always triumph, and that truth defeats falsity”.<sup>15</sup>

However, Kymlicka is aware of some difficulties which the cultural marketplace argument for neutrality may produce. Such worries are explicitly shown where he points out that “[m]inority cultures are often vulnerable to economic, cultural, and political pressure from the larger society”<sup>16</sup>, which indicates that some groups may be unfairly disadvantaged in the cultural marketplace.

I think that the most important problem of Kymlicka’s argument for the state neutrality lies somewhere else. When discussing cultural differences he is only concerned with cultural minorities. Although he insists that “[m]embership in a culture is qualitatively different from membership in other associations.

---

<sup>14</sup> W. Kymlicka, *Contemporary Political Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), p.219.

<sup>15</sup> S. Caney, ‘Consequentialist Defences of Liberal Neutrality’, *The Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 41, No.165 p.460.

<sup>16</sup> W. Kymlicka, ‘Individual and Community Rights’ in J. Baker (ed.), *Group Rights* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), p.24.

since our language and culture provide the context within which we make our choices" and that "[l]oss of cultural membership... is a profound harm that reduces one's very ability to make meaningful choices"<sup>17</sup>. he fails to see that there are a significant number of cultural communities which cannot be considered as minorities. For instance, it is hard to see how his approach can possibly deal with the cultural differences which have been emphasised by feminists.

A possible response can be that Kymlicka's approach is at least applicable to minorities. But for at least one reason, his approach faces difficulty even when concerned with cultural minorities, that is, as will be argued later, what Kymlicka fails to see is that the very nature of cultural identity makes the accommodation of cultural diversity as a certain kind of minority rights very difficult, if not impossible. The reason lies in the extent to which such differences may touch our understanding of politics itself. There are cultural communities (minority or not), for instance, which do not agree with the public-private distinction as it is viewed by liberals. For this very reason, as will become clearer later in this chapter, his neutrality of concern which he views as "the most likely political principle to secure public assent in societies like ours"<sup>18</sup> turns to be not as neutral as it seems at first, because the criterion by which the state policies

---

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*, p.25.

<sup>18</sup> Kymlicka, *Liberalism, Culture and Community*, p.95.

would be judged as neutral or otherwise is grounded on an account of autonomy-based freedom of choice for citizens which is by its very nature liberal. Such a liberal account may come into conflict with other accounts of individual freedom and autonomy held by other cultures which live within western democracies and, therefore, he needs to show the liberal account as superior, a task which itself can lead to further difficulties. This point will be more comprehensible after his conception of the self and discussion on freedom of choice and revisability is examined, a task to which I now turn.

## **2. Freedom of Choice and Revisability**

We have seen that Kymlicka wants to show how the notion of cultural membership can be accommodated within a liberal framework. He points out that liberals have distinguished two different aspects of community: the political community “within which individuals exercise the rights and responsibilities entailed by the framework of liberal justice”; and the cultural community “within which individuals form and revise their aims and ambitions”.<sup>19</sup> According to Kymlicka, these two may appear in two forms: the political community may be coextensive with one cultural community as in the ‘nation-state’; or it may contain two or more groups of people who have different cultures.

---

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. p. 135.

Kymlicka furthers his discussion by arguing that contemporary liberal theorists have failed to see that the liberal value of respect for persons can only be restricted to the respect of citizens *qua* citizen when citizenship and cultural membership coincide. In contrast, in culturally plural societies, "the demands of citizenship and cultural membership pull in different directions. Both matter, and neither seems reducible to the other".<sup>20</sup> With respect to this problem, he claims, two responses are possible. One is that "liberals have misinterpreted the role that cultural membership can or must play in their own theory".<sup>21</sup> In accordance with this response, the correct interpretation of liberalism does not require universal incorporation or a colour-blind constitution and liberals should accept the possible legitimacy of minority rights. The other response is to accept that in so far as cultural membership is concerned, liberalism is incomplete and inapplicable to multicultural societies. Clearly, it is the former response which Kymlicka tries to defend by suggesting a liberal account of the value of cultural membership.

In order to show how cultural membership can be given political weight within liberalism, Kymlicka constructs his approach in two steps by showing that first, cultural membership has a more important status in liberal thought than is explicitly

---

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*, p.152.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*, p.152.

recognised, i.e. that the individuals who are an unquestionable part of the liberal moral ontology are viewed as individual members of a particular cultural community, for whom cultural membership is an important good. And second, members of minority cultural communities may face particular kinds of disadvantages with respect to the good of cultural membership, disadvantages whose rectification requires and justifies the provision of minority rights.<sup>22</sup>

To begin with the first. Kymlicka argues that liberal thinkers like Rawls actually respect the value of cultural membership, though implicitly. It is important to them since the liberal principle of self-respect means that one's plan of life is worth carrying out and the source of such a plan is his or her cultural heritage: "[W]e decide how to lead our lives by situating ourselves in the cultural narratives, by adopting roles that have struck us as worthwhile ones, as ones worth living".<sup>23</sup> He concludes that: "Liberals should be concerned with the fate of cultural structures, not because they have some moral status of their own, but because it's only through having a rich and secure cultural structure that people can become aware, in a vivid way, of the options available to them, and intelligently examine their value".<sup>24</sup> According to Kymlicka, the mistake that liberal theorists like Rawls have made is not that they fail to see the significance

---

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, c.162.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p.165.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p.165



of cultural membership *per se*, but that they assume that the political community is culturally homogeneous. In *Liberalism, Community and Culture* he argues that the character of a cultural community should be distinguished from its 'cultural structure': the former refers to the character of a historical community, the latter refers to the cultural community itself. While changes in the norms and values would result in changes in the character of one's cultural community, the cultural community itself continues to exist besides those changes. It is the existence of the cultural community which should be viewed as a primary good in a liberal theory of justice.

Accordingly, while protecting people from changes in the character of the culture conflicts with their ability of free choice. if the cultural structure is viewed as a context of choice, the protection of cultural membership accords with the liberal principle of free revisability. Therefore, when for example Islamic fundamentalists claim that without restrictions on the freedom of speech, press, religion, sexual practices and so on their culture will disintegrate, they in fact refer to the illiberal stability of the character of the cultural community at a particular moment and not to the existence and stability of the cultural community itself. It is the latter which is defensible as a primary good, hence, a legitimate concern of liberals, not the former. Consequently, if people deny the distinction between the character of a cultural

community and its very existence, they actually give up any possible defence of liberalism itself.

This distinction, however, is open to criticism. But before discussing these criticisms, two points are worth mentioning here. First, while such an account of cultural membership and its value seems at first glance to be based on a universal valuation of human basic liberties, there are points in Kymlicka's discussion on this matter at which the ethnocentricity of his interpretation can be observed. For example, he argues that there are cases where the very survival of society requires some restriction on the freedom of choice of its members. Such restrictions are justified, Kymlicka argues, where a structure of social understandings which point out the dangers and limits of the resources at our disposal is absent. These measures, which are illiberal, are only justified as temporary measures "easing the shock which can result from too rapid change in character of the culture (be it endogenously or exogenously caused), helping the culture to move carefully towards a fully liberal society".<sup>25</sup>

If, by this, Kymlicka is suggesting, as it seems, that all communities are either liberal, or in transition to a liberal society, he needs to establish that cultures can be *made* liberal, without losing their identity. Would not liberalising the British Asian community, for instance, result in losing their identity, the existence of which makes them distinguishable from the majority

---

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p.170.

of white Christian-oriented Britons? Would it not undermine their family structure, beliefs, or customs? Andrea Baumeister's discussion of liberal education in a culturally plural society like Britain is an interesting example in this respect and although her main focus is the Rawlsian political liberalism, some of the arguments pursued there are relevant to Kymlicka's position as well. She argues that if children are to be capable of full citizenship once they reach adulthood, they will have to be educated to understand and appreciate the role of the individual (including the conception of personal autonomy) and the ideal society which underpin the notion of citizenship in a liberal society and, therefore, "children will need to be educated to make an active commitment to the values and beliefs which underpin the political framework".<sup>26</sup> Unlike mathematics and geography, autonomy cannot be taught as a separate and distinct subject, but will have to apply to the curriculum as a whole.

Moreover, because it implies the notion that children should be invited to critically examine the justification for beliefs, they will be encouraged to distance themselves from their beliefs and to entertain the possibility of doubt. This implies that they will be asked to regard their beliefs as provisional and subject to revision. Indeed, the Swann Report has proposed recommendations to promote the same capabilities in schools. In

---

<sup>26</sup> A. Baumeister, 'Political Liberalism, Education and Pluralism', Paper presented at Political Theory Seminar, Department of Politics, University of Hull, 1994, p.4.

response, some cultural communities have been critical of the underlying autonomy-valuing ethos of the Report. Their objections focus on the manner in which such a multicultural education prioritises critical rationality and the extent to which it concentrates on the individual at the expense of notions of community. Obviously, not all cultural communities accord such a priority to personal autonomy and, therefore, may view such a liberalising education system as in conflict with their cultures. The liberalisation of culture which Kymlicka proposes, therefore, implies the possibility that non-liberal cultures lose their very identity.

Moreover, the account of the limits of freedom which is presupposed here is based on the liberal conception. If there can be limits on freedom (as Kymlicka himself talks about the limits of available choices), Kymlicka needs to show why they should correspond to limits based upon liberalism. I shall return to this point in the last section of this chapter.

Another point which is worth mentioning here, in passing, is that on some occasions Kymlicka's discussion tends to oppose the claims of religious political movements. Some such arguments contain descriptions of this kind of multiculturalist movements which imply that they are principally opposed to individual freedom as such. Unfortunately his argument against cultural communities such as what he calls Islamic fundamentalists seem

to be rather ill-informed.<sup>27</sup> It is not clear, for instance, why it is assumed that such communities and the kind of politics they suggest should be against the idea of meaningful individual choice.<sup>28</sup> There is no reference to any source so that we may be able to assess their claims or the accuracy of Kymlicka's criticism. In fact, at least to my knowledge, a part of the Islamists' argument concerns the protection of the values which their religious ethics proposes as a doctrine and guidance for individuals and societies. The other part of their struggle is what is well known within non-Western communities: a struggle against what is viewed as cultural imperialism which increasingly endangers their customs and traditions. They argue that if people want an Islamic society, as Islamic teaching demands, social institutions should be shaped by Islamic values. This constitutes the very cultural identity of their community in terms of its distinguishable characters and existence.

The ambiguity of Kymlicka's discussion in *Liberalism, Culture and Community* is partly due to the ambiguous distinction he suggests between the character and the very existence of the cultural community. The distinction, however, does not seem to be as clear as he wishes. When thinking about one's cultural identity, for instance, it is hard to see how its character and

---

<sup>27</sup> The term *Fundamentalism* itself has been used to refer to very different forms of religious belief. In most cases, as Parekh points out, "[l]ike the term terrorism the term fundamentalism is increasingly become a polemical hand grenade to be thrown at those we detest and fear and whom we wish to fight and defeat with a clear conscience". B. Parekh, *The Concept of Fundamentalism*, (Warwick: The University Press, 1991), p.9.

<sup>28</sup> Kymlicka, *Liberalism, Culture and Community*, p.172.

existence can be distinguished since it can be argued that the latter is understood through the former. Accordingly, it is by their character that we identify and therefore distinguish two different cultural communities. Thus, it seems rather implausible that in identifying an abstract, complex and collective object like the cultural identity of a community, one can refer to its existence without explaining its character. Whether or not change in the characters of a cultural community would cause its disintegration, it can be suggested, depends on many factors including the extent of the changes, the way a culture deals with such changes and the extent of its changeability, a discussion which, as shown before, has been advanced by communitarians in providing a more adequate understanding of cultural changes.

The distinction between cultural structure and the particular cultural character of the community has been criticised and some have argued that it cannot be maintained. John Tomasi, for instance, argues that "Kymlicka cannot show that changes in stability of the cultural community as a choosing context are not *ipso facto* changes in the character of that cultural community: that changes in a group's beliefs about values and institutions (character) need not be changes- with respect to people's beliefs about value- in the group's history, language and culture".<sup>29</sup> According to Tomasi the distinction

---

<sup>29</sup> J. Tomasi, 'Kymlicka, Liberalism, and Respect for Cultural Minorities', *Ethics* 105, pp.591-592.

cannot help us in identifying which changes impermissibly damage people's freedom and self-respect and which do not. To protect self-respect, internal differential instability of the range of life options and the beliefs about the relative values of those options must be avoided. However, if context and character are the same, avoiding instability of context is the same as preventing cultural change. He concludes that Kymlicka's argument has the unwanted, conservative result that valid claims to group rights spring up whenever the *character* of a community is threatened with change.<sup>30</sup>

Kymlicka realises in his later work some of these difficulties and that the discussion about cultural structure is "a potentially misleading term, since it suggests an overly formal and rigid picture of what is very diffuse and open-ended phenomenon".<sup>31</sup> Consequently, he replaces this criterion of limitation on internal restriction with a stronger argument on the freedom of choice and revisability which is a result of a shift to the notion of societal culture. As Sasja Templeman argues, however, even this later version is open to the same critique: a point which will be explained in the next section.<sup>32</sup>

Kymlicka's next step is to distinguish between liberals and communitarians on this matter since one may ask the question, if

---

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, p.593.

<sup>31</sup> W. Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship*, p.83.

<sup>32</sup> S. Templeman, 'Constructions of Multiculturalism', Paper presented at Critical Legal Conference, School of Law, University of East London, September 1996.

there is an agreement between liberals and their opponents on the fact that our projects and tasks are the most important things in our lives. what does distinguish the two on this matter? Kymlicka claims that the real debate between liberals and communitarians "is not over whether we need such tasks, but over how we acquire them and judge their worth".<sup>33</sup> Accordingly, while communitarians believe that such tasks are acquired as communal values and practices which set goals for us, liberals argue that we can detach ourselves from any particular communal practice and we are free to judge, examine, and if necessary, revise them and therefore "*no end or goal is exempt from possible re-examination*".<sup>34</sup> According to Kymlicka, communitarians fail to see that central to the liberal view of the self is not whether culture is given but "whether an individual can question and possibly substitute what is the given, or whether the given has to be set for us by the community's value".<sup>35</sup> This underlines the most important difference between his argument of the value of cultural membership and that of communitarians.

An important implication of the above discussion is that the reader gets a misleading picture of at least this aspect of the debate: it might be thought that it is only the liberals who believe in the capacity of revisability and it is they who give it the importance it deserves whereas the communitarian account

---

<sup>33</sup> Cit. opt. p.50.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. p.52

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. p.51.



implies a sort of communal determinism according to which one is not free or even able to examine and revise one's conception of the good. Thus, in Kymlicka's view, "Taylor seems to believe that we can acquire these tasks only by treating communal values and practices as authoritative horizons which set goals for us"<sup>36</sup> and "MacIntyre rejects the possibility that our membership in these communal roles can be put in question".<sup>37</sup>

He maintains that "we can and do make sense of questions not just about the meaning of the roles and attachments we find ourselves in, but also about their values".<sup>38</sup> As we saw in the previous part, however, while communitarians argue that our cultural communal context is the source of our moral beliefs, it is less evident that they suggest any such a communal determinism which prevents us from examining or revising our beliefs. We also saw that some communitarians have actually offered theories which explain how such revision of moral values take place: MacIntyre's argument about the 'epistemological crisis', Taylor's conception of 'strong evaluation' and Walzer's idea of 'social criticism' are outstanding examples of such discussions. The difference between communitarianism and liberalism with respect to this matter, therefore, is not only about how individuals' cultural contexts are formed but also in the extent to which they think such revisions take place. Whereas

---

<sup>36</sup> Kymlicka, *Liberalism, Culture and Community*, p.50.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* p.56.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* p.58.

communitarians, as seen in Part I, view such revisions as limited (though not impossible). liberals like Kymlicka seem to believe in unlimited individual choice and revisability.

Kymlicka believes that the connection between individual choice and culture “provides the first step towards a distinctively liberal defence of certain group-differential rights” since “[f]or meaningful individual choice to be possible, individuals need not only access to information, the capacity to reflectively evaluate it, and freedom of expression and association. They also need access to a societal culture”.<sup>39</sup> This argument, however, indicates that he assumes a contrast between choice and force, as though an action is either chosen or forced. As Daniel Bell has pointed out, however, “it does not follow that if an action is unchosen, it’s forced” and as a matter of fact “what one does is normally not chosen, if by that we mean entertaining various possibilities and deciding among them, but neither is it forced”.<sup>40</sup> Rather, “we more often than not simply do what needs to be done in a given situation, and it’s only if there’s a disturbance of some sort that jolts us out of the normal, everyday mode of existence that we might have to think of ourselves as conscious subjects deciding between various ways of pursuing some goal.”<sup>41</sup> Moreover, it is mistaken to say that an unexamined life is an unworthy life, “that we should withdraw our respect from those who haven’t

---

<sup>39</sup> Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship*, p.84.

<sup>40</sup> D. Bell, *Communitarianism and Its Critics* (Oxford:Clarendon Press, 1993), p.40.

<sup>41</sup> *ibid.*, p.40.

exercised their normative powers of self-determination.”<sup>42</sup> Thus, if a person simply does what she has to do which for her involves leading a life guided by the unquestioned authority of the Catholic Church, and which in practice means helping newly arrived Vietnamese refugees by giving her possessions to those in great need, for instance, it does not mean that her way of life deserves any less respect than that of someone who has exercised their normative powers of self-determination. Not all unchosen actions, therefore, are necessarily forced. Consequently, merely by identifying unchosen actions in a cultural community, one cannot conclude that they are forced and, therefore, against the very freedom of individuals. This clearly undermines the force of Kymlicka’s justification for his call for the liberalisation of illiberal cultural communities, a discussion which will attract our attention in the next section.

### **3. Internal Restrictions and External Protections**

So far I have been mainly concerned with the theoretical aspects of Kymlicka’s liberal approach to the problem of cultural diversity. In this section, I shall examine some important implications of his argument with more political concern. Kymlicka argues that traditional standards of human rights are not able to resolve some of the most important and controversial

---

<sup>42</sup> *ibid.*, p.41.

questions relating to cultural minorities, for instance in deciding whether or not political offices should be distributed in accordance with a principle of national or ethnic proportionality. In response to this shortcoming, he believes, "[a] liberal theory of minority rights, therefore, must explain how minority rights coexist with human rights, and how minority rights are limited by principles of individual liberty, democracy, and social justice".<sup>43</sup>

Since there is no single traditional approach to minority rights, he identifies a distinctly liberal approach by laying out the basic principles of liberalism which in his view are principles of individual freedom. Therefore, liberals can only endorse minority rights in so far as they are consistent with respect for the freedom or autonomy of individuals.<sup>44</sup>

Kymlicka then distinguishes between two broad patterns of cultural diversity. The first is one which is concerned with national minorities which typically wish to maintain themselves as distinct societies. The second is concerned with ethnic groups, which typically wish to integrate into the larger society, and to be accepted as full members of it. Three forms of group-differentiated rights for minority cultures have been recognised: Self-government rights, Polyethnic rights (e.g. the exemption of the Amish in the United States from compulsory education of children): and Special representation rights (e.g. guaranteed

---

<sup>43</sup> Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship*, p.6.

<sup>44</sup> *ibid.* p.75.

representation for Aboriginals in the Senate or for francophones on the Supreme Court in Canada). Whereas the first encourage the national minority to view itself as a separate people with inherent rights to govern themselves, the second and third are consistent with integrating minority groups. Kymlicka's aim is to defend these rights from a liberal standpoint.

His next step is to define the sort of culture with which he is concerned, which he calls *societal*: "a culture which provides its members with meaningful ways of life across the full range of human activities, including social, educational, religious, recreational, and economic life, encompassing both public and private spheres".<sup>45</sup> Kymlicka maintains that the liberal argument of freedom is dependent on the presence of a societal culture (as the context of choice available to individuals). It should be noticed, then, that in his view since societal cultures tend to be national cultures in the sense of culturally distinct, geographically concentrated, and institutionally complete societies, from the two types of cultural minorities mentioned above, it accords only with national minorities. As Mitchell Cohen observes, he does not sanction such broad privileges for ethnic groups and "never explains how, given his distinction of liberalism from communitarianism, he can object to an ethnic immigrant who revises radically his or her life-plans, perhaps choosing to re-

---

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.* c.76.

create a native societal culture in new surroundings".<sup>46</sup>

At one point Kymlicka argues that if immigrants had the option to stay in their original culture, the expectation of integration is not unjust. He explains further that if, for instance, a group of Americans decide to emigrate to Sweden, they have no right against the Swedish government to provide them with institutions of self-government or public services in their mother tongue.<sup>47</sup> He does not suggest, however, that voluntary immigrants have no claims regarding the expression of their identity. He also sympathises with the claim that "[i]ntegration is a two-way process- it requires the mainstream society to adopt itself to immigrants, just as immigrants must adopt to the mainstream"<sup>48</sup> and argues that this requires strong efforts at fighting prejudices and discrimination; and the modification of the institutions of the dominant culture in the form of group-specific polyethnic rights. But none of these suggests that voluntary immigrants have the rights to claim protection of their culture.

Having defined societal culture, he goes on to show the nature of freedom as it is conceived by the liberal tradition:

The defining feature of liberalism is that it ascribes certain fundamental freedoms to each individual. In particular, it grants people a very wide freedom of choice in terms of how they lead their lives. It

---

<sup>46</sup> M. Cohen, 'How do we make citizens?', *TLS* February 23 1996.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p.96.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p.96.

allows people to choose a conception of the good life, and then allows them to reconsider that decision, and adopt a new and hopefully better plan.<sup>49</sup>

Accordingly, in the case of religion, for instance, a liberal society allows individuals the freedom not only to pursue their existing faith, but also to seek new adherents for their faith or to question the doctrine of their church. How does this relate to the membership in societal cultures? Kymlicka's answer runs as follows: "freedom involves making choices amongst various options, and our societal culture not only provides these options, but also makes them meaningful to us".<sup>50</sup> This is the outline of Kymlicka's approach for suggesting a liberal theory of multicultural citizenship through which traditional liberal values are defended alongside the fact of cultural diversity of contemporary liberal democracies. It is now time to consider the difficulties it faces which can be argued in two groups: those which are concerned with the protection of immigrants' cultures; and others which concentrate on Kymlicka's distinction between liberal and non-liberal cultures. I shall begin with the first.

His argument about immigrants seems to be open to a number of criticisms: The first objection concerns his argument about voluntary and involuntary immigration. He argues that the former have no rights to policies which are concerned with self-

---

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p.80.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.* p.83.

government. The only reason which I can think of to support this claim is that he considers voluntary immigrants as having a status similar to guests: if a guest is invited to your home, he is expected to respect (but not necessarily accept) your way of life. Similarly, voluntary immigrants have come to your country while supposedly aware of the culture of the mainstream, and, therefore, may be expected to integrate. If I am correct in my reading, the justification seems deceptive because while it may apply to visitors to a country, it cannot be applied to immigrants, voluntary or not. Since the latter are given citizenship and, consequently, once they are citizens, there is no reason to refuse them such self-government rights.

Why, then, exempt immigrants from such rights? The answer, I think, lies in Kymlicka's definition of societal cultures. As seen above, he describes them as cultures which provide their members with meaningful ways of life across all human activities and then he adds that such cultures tend to be territorially concentrated and based on a shared language, i.e. nations. By not considering ethnic cultures as societal, he implies two possibilities. He may think that the culture of an immigrant group does not provide its members with such meaningful ways of life and is not concerned with all human activities. If that is the case, then he should explain in what way it differs from a societal culture.



The alternative implication is that the difference between these two types of cultural communities is that one is territorially concentrated whereas the other is not. However, if that is his view, then he should show how this would affect the status of their claims to self-government policies. Even if some self-governmental policies require the group to be territorially concentrated, there are many others which do not. Consider, for instance, the demand for culturally based education. If such a demand requires governmental support, should it be given to national groups but not ethnic groups? As seen above, according to Kymlicka, societal cultures provide their members with meaningful ways of life across the full range of human activities, including education. Would it be fair to consider national cultures as entitled to the right to their own education but exclude other cultural minorities from such a right just because the latter are not territorially concentrated?

If Kymlicka's answer to this is negative, a question which arises is to what extent the distinction between the two types of cultural minorities affects state policies. Would it not be more adequate for him to argue that if territorial concentration is a necessary condition to some state policies (concerned with cultural communities), cultural minorities of the second type would not be entitled to them? This latter argument would suggest that the right to control immigration which is applied to

some national minorities like the Aboriginals in Canada, for instance, is not applicable to ethnic groups. But it is hard to see its significance, therefore, in terms of possessing different moral status. It is obvious that such rights make sense if only the minority is concentrated in a distinguishable land. Understood in this way, therefore, the distinction between national cultural groups and ethnic immigrants seems to be unhelpful in providing an appropriate ground for political decisions of this kind.

The distinction, then, should have another status in Kymlicka's approach. This becomes clear when we recall that his multiculturalism is principally restricted to cultures that can be described as "an integrational community, more or less institutionally complete, occupying a given territory or homeland, sharing a distinct language and history"<sup>51</sup> since only these cultures can provide individuals a rich and stable context of choice. As Templeman points out, however, it can be asked how many national and ethnic communities fit this description. By relying on such an unrealistic description, Templeman argues, Kymlicka fails to see that most of contemporary societies "do not form distinctive, coherent cultural wholes, nor do they partition neatly into 'majority' and 'minority' blocs that do."<sup>52</sup> Moreover, this approach installs and morally justifies a political hierarchy of claims between 'nation' and 'national minorities' on the one

---

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p.18.

<sup>52</sup> Templeman, 'Constructions of Multiculturalism', p.23.

hand, and other cultural, ethnic, religious, linguistic groups on the other. Thus, "[t]he distinction between national and other cultural groups is a *principled* one: it points towards a fundamental difference in *moral status*."<sup>53</sup> This follows directly from his conception of the person as an individual who can develop his or her autonomy and liberal capacities in a secure cultural context. What matters, therefore, is the individual *qua* member of the cultural community; but not just any cultural community, only a rich and broad societal culture.<sup>54</sup> (This shows how close Kymlicka's approach is to Dworkin's in this respect.) But as Templeman argues, the assimilatory pressure which it suggests is a highly questionable way to achieve integration of immigrants.<sup>55</sup> Related to this last argument is a second group of criticisms which concerns his discussion about non-liberal cultures. First, as we saw in the previous section, some critics like Tomasi argue that Kymlicka cannot maintain the distinction between cultures as context of choice and culture as the particular character of the community. The question which comes to mind is whether, by adopting the notion of societal culture in *Multicultural Citizenship*, Kymlicka would be able to avoid such a critique. As Templeman argues, however, such an enormous broadening of scope makes it even more difficult to distinguish fundamental threats to the context of choice

---

<sup>53</sup> *ibid.* p.24.

<sup>54</sup> *ibid.* p.24.

<sup>55</sup> *ibid.* p.24.

dimension of the community from mere changes in contingent character of the community since “[m]odern states and minority groups are continuously in disorienting transition” and “[a]lmost all are becoming more multicultural and multilingual than most of them already were”.<sup>56</sup> Therefore, “[t]hey do not offer the stable context of choice Kymlicka seems to presume.”<sup>57</sup>

Secondly, it was observed in the last chapter, in arguing that Raz mistakenly equates illiberal with anti-liberal cultural communities, that the former describes a cultural community as non-liberal, in terms of having a culture the contents of which are different from that of the western liberal cultures, whereas the latter implies one which is necessarily against individual freedom. Kymlicka can be seen to make the same mistake. He argues that some nations and national movements are deeply illiberal since “far from enabling autonomy, [they] simply assign particular roles and duties to people, and prevent them from questioning or revising them”.<sup>58</sup> He asks, then, whether members of illiberal cultures should be encouraged or compelled to be assimilated into more liberal cultures. Since this ignores the way people are bound to their own cultures, he suggests that “[t]he aim of liberals should not be to dissolve non-liberal nations, but rather to seek to liberalize them”.<sup>59</sup> Kymlicka fails to see that Muslims,

---

<sup>56</sup> *ibid* p.22

<sup>57</sup> *ibid*, p.22.

<sup>58</sup> Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship*, p.94.

<sup>59</sup> *ibid*, p.94.

Jews or Hindus may hold cultures which may not be described as liberal, but this does not necessarily mean that they do not respect individual autonomy and freedom at all.

This objection can be answered by pointing out that illiberal cultures nevertheless do not believe in autonomy and freedom as presented by the liberal tradition. This may provide a plausible reply and as a matter of fact many illiberal cultures do not wish to deny this. However, all it means is that such illiberal cultures do not hold the conception of individual-autonomy-as-defined-by-liberalism, and not, as both Raz's and Kymlicka's arguments imply, that they oppose individual autonomy altogether. Non-liberal cultures may respect individual autonomy and freedom; and autonomy may be considered as an important, but not necessarily the most important, moral value. They may respect toleration, but draw limits to it which are different from the liberal limits. Freedom, autonomy and toleration may have different meanings in those cultures and may be based on a different mode of moral enquiry. None of these, though, provides sufficient grounds for subordinating them under the liberal culture.

The correct line of argument by liberals, therefore, could be as follows: which of the conceptions of autonomy most adequately captures our understandings of the notion? This, however, raises a possibility that when comparing the liberal and

illiberal (non-liberal) conceptions of autonomy we may realise that at least some cultures are incommensurable or even untranslatable, each having its own mode of moral enquiry and each based on a particular rationality.

Since one of the examples which Kymlicka presents in order to show the difference between the liberal and illiberal accounts of autonomy is the 'millet system' of the Ottoman Empire, I shall look at this argument in more depth. Kymlicka begins by arguing that liberalism and toleration are closely related, both historically and conceptually since the development of religious tolerance was one of the historical roots of liberalism. This conception of toleration, however, has taken a very specific form, namely, the idea of individual freedom of conscience.<sup>60</sup>

He acknowledges, however, that there are other forms of religious toleration which are not liberal. In the 'millet system' of the Ottoman Empire, for example, Muslims, Christians, and Jews were all recognised as self-governing units (or 'millets'), and allowed to impose restrictive religious laws on their own members.<sup>61</sup> According to Kymlicka, however, this system was not liberal since it did not recognise any principle of individual freedom of conscience since there was little or no scope for individual dissent within each religious community, and little or no freedom to change one's faith:

---

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p.156.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p.156.

While the Muslims did not try to suppress the Jews, or vice versa, they did suppress heretics within their own community. Heresy (questioning the orthodox interpretation of Muslim doctrine) and apostasy (abandoning one's religious faith) were punishable crimes within the Muslim community. Restrictions on individual freedom of conscience also existed in the Jewish and Christian communities.<sup>62</sup>

Note, however, what this example *can* show is that in the 'millet system' there were cultural communities coexisting with each other on a model of toleration which was different from the modern liberal one. and, therefore, individual freedom was not allowed in the former to the extent it is in the latter. What it *cannot* show is that those cultural communities necessarily opposed any form of toleration and individual freedom and Kymlicka's argument of course needs to establish the first and not the second.

Kymlicka then argues about liberal limitations on minority rights. In this regard, he argues, liberal principles impose two fundamental limitations: first, they will not justify internal restrictions by which he means the demand by a minority culture to restrict the basic civil or political liberties of its own members. Second, as far as demands for external protection are concerned, liberal justice cannot accept any such rights which enable one group to oppress or exploit other groups. In short, "a liberal view

---

<sup>62</sup> *ibid.* p.157.

requires *freedom within* the minority group, and *equality between* the minority and majority groups".<sup>63</sup> He realises then the limits of a liberal argument of minority rights since it only defends such rights if and in so far as they are themselves governed by liberal principles.

Yet there are cultural minorities which reject liberalism. Kymlicka claims that this conflates two distinct questions: first, what sorts of minority claims are consistent with liberal principles? and, second, should liberals impose their views on non-liberal principles? He makes clear that his discussion concerns the first which is the question of identifying a defensible liberal theory of minority rights, not the second which concerns imposing that theory. He admits then that if two national groups do not share principles, and neither can be persuaded to adopt the other's principles, "they will have to rely on some other basis of accommodation, such as a *modus vivendi*."<sup>64</sup> This is the conclusion at which the reader arrives at the end of *Multicultural Citizenship* (perhaps too late) and we are back to square one. Templeman seems to be right to suggest that this apparently open attitude is deceptive since from the beginning there is no real dialogue between the 'liberal' and the 'illiberal' culture. According to Templeman, although in Kymlicka's discussion the negotiations are aimed at reaching an agreement on fundamental

---

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p.152.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p.168.



principles, the possibility is excluded from the start that the liberal party could be persuaded to adopt the other's principles. The non-liberal culture, therefore, is put on the defensive and confronted with a 'take-it-or-leave-it' option. Furthermore, any 'modus vivendi' they might agree on will be nothing more than a temporary practical accommodation where they are still branded as morally ignorant or wrong.<sup>65</sup>

I believe, however, that the *modus vivendi* model is the only available answer in so far as one is concerned with a significant number of non-liberal cultures. But contrary to Kymlicka's view, this may not be true only of national groups, but may apply to ethnic and religious group as well, since the issue at hand is not the forms or origins of cultural communities, but whether or not their cultures adopt liberal values.

Thus, Kymlicka's theory of multicultural politics turns out to have restricted application since it has little, if anything, to offer multicultural societies in which a liberal community lives alongside non-liberal cultures, the situation with which the problem of cultural diversity is mostly concerned.

#### **4. Conclusion**

We have seen in this chapter that Kymlicka attempts to accommodate the politics of cultural diversity within a liberal

---

<sup>65</sup> Templeman, *Constructions of Multiculturalism*, p.25.

framework. In order to do so, he argues that cultural membership should be viewed amongst the primary goods with which a liberal theory of justice is concerned. Accordingly, the state should provide for each individual the liberties and resources needed to exercise and act upon his or her conception of the good life. Consequently, he criticises both Rawls's anti-perfectionism on the one hand and Raz's criticism against all types of state neutrality on the other. Instead, he adopts an indirect perfectionism which argues that although the state should be neutral towards different conceptions of the good, it should nevertheless ensure that the cultural resources and freedom which are required in choosing and revising one's conception of the good are available to all of its citizens.

However, his indirect perfectionism, as seen above, faces difficulties. For instance, his respect for the freedom of choice and revising one's choice on the one hand, and his commitment to state neutrality on the other, lead him to suggest that revision in general is good and not only one which is towards true beliefs. Moreover, his appeal to a certain (Millian) account of individual autonomy in deciding the permissible range of cultures undermines the neutrality of the liberal state which he suggests. Partly to avoid such difficulties, Kymlicka adopts two strategies: the first, mainly discussed in his earlier works, is to distinguish culture as the particular character of the community from its

cultural structure. It is the latter which provides the individual a stable context of choice and, therefore, to be viewed as a primary good in a liberal theory of justice. However, as observed in section 2, some critics have argued that the distinction cannot be maintained successfully since it cannot help us to identify which cultural changes damage people's freedom of self-respect and which do not.

Kymlicka's second strategy is built upon the notion of societal cultures which defines culture as providing its members with meaningful ways of life across the full human activities, both in public and private spheres. According to Kymlicka, in the modern world, societal cultures are typically tied with nations and national groups. Thus, societal cultures becomes a synonym for nations and cultural minorities for national minorities. As seen above, this apparently improved strategy does not offer the stable context of choice which Kymlicka seems to presume since the beliefs about value which are held within cultures are highly contradictory and unstable. Moreover, his universalist understanding of culture and cultural communities as contexts of choice has a very limited application to multicultural societies since, as his argument for the internal restrictions and external protections indicates, it excludes non-liberal cultures (whether minority or not) either because they are not sufficiently stable to provide the required range of options for individuals, or because

they do not share the liberal emphasis on the value of choice.

This, as I discussed above, is the consequence of his commitment to the liberal account of freedom since Kymlicka views non-liberal cultures (by which he means ones which do not value individual's autonomy of choice and revisability) as inferior. However, non-liberal cultures, which are of significant concern in arguments about multiculturalism, are not necessarily against the individual's freedom in its entirety, though their understanding of it may differ from the liberal account. They may not hold the private-public distinction as defined by liberals and they may not view individual's freedom as the most valuable good. This does not mean, however, that they are against individual freedom *per se*.

I have also discussed that the distinction between national minorities as territorially concentrated cultural communities and immigrants does not establish the inferior moral and political status for the latter when the protection of cultural identity is concerned.

Kymlicka's liberal approach to cultural diversity, in sum, seems to be limited in application and in appropriateness.

**PAGE  
MISSING  
IN  
ORIGINAL**

## CHAPTER 10

### CONCLUSION: TOWARDS A POLITICS OF CULTURAL DIVERSITY?

The aim of this dissertation has been to show which of the two sides of the liberal-communitarian debate offers a more adequate position in relation to the politics of cultural diversity. Although the arguments which have been presented in the previous chapters may already have implied that communitarians offer a more adequate position, through their views of the self and their accounts of the foundations of political morality, than liberal theories which seem to be inadequate and sometimes culturally biased, it would be useful to show the implications of those arguments more clearly. This is the main task which will be undertaken in the first section of this chapter. It does not mean, however, that the communitarian position is without its own difficulties. Such difficulties, in particular, concern the practical obstacles of a communitarian solution to cultural diversity. In order to shed lights on these difficulties, I shall use some other arguments which have been offered as alternatives to the liberal view in the second section.

## **1. Communitarians and Liberals and the Politics of Cultural Diversity**

As noted in chapter 1, the present survey concentrated on three main themes in its reading of the selected theories: the concept of the self, the account of the foundations of political morality, and the politics of cultural diversity. The concluding remarks which follow will address each of these themes respectively.

The first theme with which I have been concerned is the conception of the self held within each theory. Its importance lies in indicating the relation between the self and her culture as viewed by each thinker.

Generally speaking, communitarians view culture as constitutive of one's identity. They argue for a concept of the self whose unity resides in the unity of a narrative which links birth to life to death in a coherent way. In this view, a person is essentially a story-telling animal and the unity of human life is the unity of the narrative quest which is looking for a conception of the good through which the self will be enabled to order other goods, to extend the understanding of the purpose and contents of the virtues, and to understand the place of integrity and constancy in life. Another important part of our identity is concerned with comprehending the place one possesses as a potential interlocutor in a society of interlocutors, which is involved in comprehending our identity in terms of our

relationships with others and our social roles. Accordingly, the general feature of human life is its dialogical character. Persons become full human agents, capable of understanding themselves, and hence defining their identities, through their acquisition of rich human language of expression. Human beings are culture-producing creatures and, therefore, cultural and social contexts play a crucial role in constituting their identity.

Liberals, on the other hand, hold an essentially different understanding of the self. Although the importance of the social matrix is now appreciated in a sense very close to the communitarian view, for a significant number of liberal thinkers, the liberal distinction between the self as a private individual and his or her identity as a citizen in the public sphere, places social and cultural contexts on a distinguishably different level, since cultural particularities are viewed as private matters.

Speaking more specifically, for Rawls, the person is to be viewed *qua* citizen, leaving all controversies between different conceptions of the good to the private sphere of life. This conception of citizenship, he argues, is implicit in the shared political culture of western liberal democracies. The self is viewed as a free moral agent who should be able to choose and pursue his or her ideal life without any social or political interference.

Raz, on the other hand, views the significance of cultural environment as crucial to one's ability to conduct an autonomous



life and is opposed to any sort of neutrality of the liberal state. Cultures are important to individuals since they provide the range of choice which is considered as the precondition for living an autonomous life and to support a valuable form of life is a social rather than an individual matter.

Similarly, Kymlicka argues for the importance of cultural context in leading an autonomous life, though he thinks that the acknowledgement of the close relation between the self and culture can, and should, be accommodated within liberal theories of justice. To this end, he argues that cultural membership should be viewed amongst other primary goods with which a liberal theory of justice is concerned. However, he draws attention to the difference between such a liberal view and the communitarian understanding: although cultural membership is important for liberals, it does not endorse limits to one's freedom to criticise and revise the conception of the good held within one's community, as he believes that communitarianism does. Although it has been shown before, it is worth mentioning again, that none of the three communitarian theorists discussed here rules out the possibility of criticism from within, though they do not view such criticism and revisions as unlimited.

The second theme is concerned with the account which each theorist offers of the foundations of political morality and its relation to cultural difference.

A point which is worth mentioning in this respect is that as far as the communitarian critique of modernity and liberal moral and political theory is concerned, all it needs to show (and all that it actually shows) is that modern moral theory is not capable of providing universal moral foundations for politics in multicultural societies. Thus, while their arguments underline the cultural particularity of modern moral philosophy, the three communitarians whose positions have been studied here oppose absolute moral relativism. MacIntyre distinguishes his view from a relativist one since he does not reject the possibility of finding universality altogether. Moreover, he points out that if two rival moral traditions are able to recognise each other as advancing rival contentions on important issues, they must necessarily share at least some common features. He believes, however, that by appealing to such universality, we cannot go far enough in establishing the grounds for which we are searching. Taylor, too, argues against the sort of moral relativism which holds that the person determines what is significant for himself or herself. He points out that one's feeling a certain way can never be sufficient grounds for respecting one's position, because one's feeling cannot determine what is significant in one's difference from others. For Walzer, too, although no morality can be universally valid, and interpretation is the approach we take in studying what is best for us as members of particular communities, there is a

thin morality which makes for a certain limited, though important and heartening, solidarity between us as human beings.

Unlike communitarians, however, none of the three liberal thinkers whose theories have been presented here is concerned with the critique of modern morality as such. Instead, they are concerned, though to different extents, with principles which explain the relationship between man and society, on the basis of which rules and restraints can be justified to the people who live in liberal democracies in the West. Such principles must enjoy a kind of universality, at least within the context of these societies.

In this respect, we have seen that Raz and Kymlicka appeal to liberalism (and the concept of autonomy as its most central principle) itself. Raz argues that individuals should enjoy the freedom to lead their lives in accordance with the conceptions of the good which they choose and that the plurality of valuable conceptions of the good is the precondition for autonomous life. Since autonomy should be regarded as the supreme principle which governs the politics of liberal societies, however, only those cultural communities which respect individual autonomy can be tolerated.

Kymlicka argues, similarly, that in multicultural societies within which cultural minorities live with cultures which are different from the liberal culture (e.g. Aboriginals in Canada), non-liberal cultural communities should be granted special rights

which are required for their protection as long as they respect their members' right to choose and revise their conception of the good life. The models of politics of cultural diversity proposed by Raz and Kymlicka are based, therefore, on the moral principle of individual autonomy which is a part of liberalism as a comprehensive doctrine. Thus, both Raz and Kymlicka try to accommodate the pursuit of conceptions of the good within liberal politics. Such limits to political toleration, however, reveal their views as rather narrow and inadequate since, as argued before, they fail to see that what distinguishes the liberal culture from a significant number of non-liberal cultures is not that the former respects individual autonomy and the latter do not, but that each culture holds a particular conception of autonomy with respect to its content, status and limits.<sup>1</sup> The respect for individual autonomy, therefore, cannot be used as a political yardstick in deciding the permissible range of claims of multicultural rights.

Rawls rightly sees this line of argument as problematic and, therefore, appeals to a political conception of justice which in his view is representative of moral principles which are implicit in the culture of constitutional democracies. Consequently, of the three liberal political theorists which have been discussed here, only Rawls tries to provide a neutral and universal foundation by arguing that within the culture of constitutional democracies of

---

<sup>1</sup> Chapter 8 section 3 and chapter 9 section 3.

the West the adherents of comprehensive moral, religious and philosophical doctrines can agree on an overlapping consensus in terms of justice as fairness as a political (in contrast to metaphysical) concept. By appealing to a political concept of justice, Rawls tries to avoid the controversies concerning conceptions of good. As has been argued, however, this political conception is by its very nature a part of a particular (i.e. Kantian) comprehensive liberal theory since it relies on particular liberal conceptions like the public-private distinction which are themselves subject to criticism by many cultural communities. Indeed, some demands of multiculturalism (e.g. those of feminists) concern the moral principles which are viewed as common in the culture of western democracies by Rawls. The Rawlsian overlapping consensus, therefore, does not allow for many non-liberal doctrines, nor for some liberal (e.g. Hobbesian) doctrines which have different views on such matters.

Liberal theories of cultural diversity, in other words, prove to be based on already too thick moral foundations, while what is required for politics in multicultural societies is a thin moral ground on which different cultures can agree. Thin moral ground which, as Walzer describes, consists of "principles and rules that are reiterated in different times and places, and that seem to be similar even though they are expressed in different idioms and

reflect different histories and different versions of the world".<sup>2</sup> This means that such minimalism depends on "the fact that we have moral expectations about the behavior not only of our fellows but of strangers too. And they have overlapping expectations about their own behavior and ours as well."<sup>3</sup> Thickly conceived values, by contrast, are *ours*. Thus, as mentioned above, the communitarian critique of liberalism does not (and need not) rule out the possibility of articulating moral universal frameworks, though the cultural particularity of human reasoning severely undermines the possibility of undertaking such a project. The communitarian critique, therefore, does not result in moral relativism, but indicates the difficulties which arise in investigating universal foundations, and the limited application of universal moral principles in constructing political ideas in culturally heterogeneous societies.

The last theme concerns the position of each theorist on the politics of cultural diversity. As discussed above, Taylor's discussion serves to underline the contradictory nature of modern politics: it has come to be a politics of universalism with the aim of equalising rights and entitlement on the one hand; and the politics of difference which concerns the recognition of the unique identity of individuals or groups and their distinction from others, on the other. Taylor also rightly points out that, in

---

<sup>2</sup> M. Walzer, *Thick and Thin: Moral Argument at Home and Abroad* (Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), p.17.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p.17.

making their demands, proponents of multiculturalism cannot rely on any argument which presumes the equal value of cultures. His suggestions for multicultural politics, however, are limited to those multicultural societies within which fundamental notions of liberalism are to some extent agreed as the foundation of political decision making. For culturally plural societies in which non-liberal cultures live alongside the dominant liberal culture, however, Taylor's argument remains silent.

As I mentioned in my chapter on MacIntyre, when demands of respect for cultural difference are involved with moral issues, the problem of the politics of cultural diversity seems to be best formulated if cultures, or at least those features of cultures the implications of which are of political significance, are viewed as contexts and resources of traditions of moral enquiry. Such an understanding is consistent with the point that moral philosophers always articulate the morality of some particular social and cultural standpoint. An important implication of this account is that the concerns of the politics of cultural difference go far beyond the preservation of cultural communities in terms of preserving some components of culture like the spoken language. They encompass the very foundations of the political decision-making process and the moral and political values involved. Since (unlike the liberal view) no superiority of any particular culture is supposed, no matter how different a culture

is from the dominant liberal culture, every cultural community has to be considered in this kind of politics. Politics should be concerned with conceptions of the good and cultural communities should be able to be governed in accordance with the good or goods which they hold as valuable. That is, cultural communities are entitled to the kind of cultural recognition as engaged in pursuing their conceptions of the good life and, therefore, the political arrangements of these communities must secure the basic conditions for their self-determination as engaged in activities that constitute those conceptions. As mentioned in chapter 3, MacIntyre believes that if the idea of widespread participation is central to democratic politics, arguments to, from and about conceptions of the common good are integral to the practice of participatory community and, therefore, what is needed in our time is a politics of self-defence for all those cultures that aspire to form participatory-based communities. This means that we need to move towards a kind of politics which allows cultural communities to be governed in accordance with the conception of the good life which is shared by their members.

Such a politics of common good, however, has been criticised by contemporary liberal philosophers (e.g. Rawls). They argue that it is incompatible with pluralism which is viewed as one of the most distinctive characteristics of modern society. In



their view, it is impossible to combine democratic institutions with the sense of common purpose that pre-modern society enjoyed. Political participation based on a shared conception of the good, therefore, is viewed as incompatible with the modern idea of liberty.

As I mentioned in my chapter on Rawls, however, such a contrast between democratic societies on the one hand, and associations and political communities on the other hand, is not unproblematic.<sup>4</sup> It needs to be shown, for instance, whether all political communities are necessarily undemocratic if they are not based on liberal principles. The assumption that political communities are undemocratic by their very nature is based upon the liberal conception of the self. What worries liberals is that political communities can be repressive in relation to the individuals' freedom in choosing and revising their conceptions of the good life. How are disagreements over the conception of the good possessed by a community settled and if membership in a community is determined by birth or religious faith, for instance, how does one leave on the face of disagreement? We have seen that communitarians believe that the liberal conception of the self which is characteristically overly individualistic does not capture our actual self-understanding since we ordinarily think of ourselves with respect to our social attachments and connections. Nor do people necessarily have a highest-order interest against

---

<sup>4</sup> Chapter 7 section 1.

which they rationally choose their ways of life. The justification for a liberal form of social organisation founded on the value of reflective choice, therefore, is seriously undermined. Moreover, it is only within some socially located standpoints that the individual recognises such strongly evaluated goods which he or she may endorse reflectively.

We have also seen that for communitarians, commitment to a tradition does not exclude dialogue with other traditions and does not imply intolerance. What constitutes a tradition, as MacIntyre's argument suggests, is a conflict of interpretations of that tradition and all kinds of traditions involve epistemological debate as a necessary feature of their conflicts. Moreover, disagreements over the conception of the good may be led to epistemological crisis. The communitarian argument, therefore, does not deny the possibility of criticism from within and commitment to shared conceptions of the good does not undermine democratic values.

This, of course, does not mean that there is no problem in the way of the formation of a politics which is based on the shared conception of the good within a cultural community. Consider, for instance, the problem of identifying one's cultural membership. Can one be a member of more than one community and if so which conception of the good is one governed by? Nationality, membership in religious communities, ethnicity, age,

occupation, sex, and so on, are considered as different aspects of one's identity. As A. O. Rorty points out, the role any of these groups or associations plays in an individual's identity and in forming and sustaining her pursuit of a conception of good life varies contextually.<sup>5</sup> Even if we stress on cultural identity as the most significant in shaping one's identity, the identification of a cultural group presents serious theoretical and practical problems, since the distinction between culture and economic or sociopolitical structures is a theory-bound distinction and, therefore, a matter of dispute. Amongst communitarian thinkers whose positions have been explored in this dissertation, perhaps MacIntyre's argument of traditions of moral enquiry can be more helpful in this respect as he considers cultures as the contexts of such traditions. Since the distinction between traditions is not the same as the distinction between cultural communities, his argument does not fall victim to criticisms like Rorty's. So far as the problem of identification is concerned, traditions are identified and individuated by the goods which constitute them and the account of rationality they hold. MacIntyre's account of tradition of moral enquiry not only acknowledges the possible diversity over the correct interpretation, but also holds what constitutes a tradition is such a conflict. Moreover, the participants in a tradition may also disagree as to how to

---

<sup>5</sup> A. O. Rorty, 'The Hidden Politics of Cultural Identification', *Political Theory*, Vol. 22, No. 1, February 1994, p.154-155.

characterise their disagreements and how to resolve them. This, however, does not mean that his argument is not in need of further clarification. But considering the scope of the present survey, which is limited to the politics of cultural communities which are concerned at the same time with moral difference, we may tolerably adopt MacIntyre's position as a key to the formation of the politics of common good within cultural communities.

As mentioned before, however, while such an account of the politics of the common good may imply the way in which the internal affairs of cultural communities can be formed, it does not supply what is needed for the relation between communities. Whereas the politics within a cultural community can and should be based on a shared conception of the good life, relations among communities cannot be formed around conceptions of the good because of the absence of such a shared conception.

Walzer's discussion of thick and thin moral arguments can be helpful in this respect. As discussed in chapter 5, according to Walzer, moral terms have minimal and maximal meanings and we can standardly give thin and thick accounts of them, and the two accounts are appropriate to different contexts, and serve different purposes. The thick character of morality, for instance, is reiteratively particularist and locally significant, intimately bound up with the maximal moralities. It has been argued that

although Walzer's view of the self and political morality is to a great extent similar to MacIntyre's and Taylor's, when it comes to the politics of cultural diversity, he draws different conclusions. As argued above, Walzer's problems begin from equating nations with cultural communities, and his commitment to liberal notions like the private-public distinction which seems to prevent him from recognising the extent to which cultural differences matter in politics, even in a country like the United States, which he views as culturally homogenised.<sup>6</sup> For this very reason, he does not think that majorities have any obligation to protect the culture of cultural minorities such as immigrant ethnic groups. It has also been argued that it is here that I think his position is inconsistent. However, this is not to say that such an inconsistency undermines the significance of his argument about *thick* and *thin* morality *per se*. Rather, it implies that it should be located not only at the international level, but also at the national level in multicultural societies. In fact, it provides a unique understanding of the problem of the politics of cultural diversity.

The important implication of this argument is that moral precepts and concepts can be viewed at two levels: one at which cultural particularities are of central importance so that the distinction between different traditions of moral enquiry is at its fullest extent; and the other at which universally acceptable principles, though very thin, are required. The former constitutes

---

<sup>6</sup> Chapter 5 section 4.

the form of politics suitable within communities since it is capable of securing the conditions for their self-determination as engaged in the activities that constitute their conceptions of the good life; in the absence of a shared conception of the good, the latter is of doubtful value in providing any moral foundation thickly conceived for politics, yet suitable for the relations between communities. This account implies a more adequate understanding of cultural difference. Yet, there are a number of obstacles in the way of the politics of cultural diversity which need further investigation.

One of such obstacles concerns the limits of toleration towards cultural diversity. Can the thin moral principles governing relations among communities allow any sort of community (e.g. very repressive communities) to be a member of this larger unit? It was mentioned above that Walzer holds that national minorities should be able to live 'at ease within modest bounds'.<sup>7</sup> But, as has been mentioned there, it lacks the force for establishing what is claimed to be a universally acceptable minimal morality since here again, there might be divergence over the interpretation of such principles. In order to apply Walzer's theory of thin morality to the relations between cultural diversity, therefore, further investigation is required. It is not, however, the only difficulty in our way to the politics of cultural diversity as there are more problems to be dealt. The next section

---

<sup>7</sup> Chapter 5, section 4.

will indicate some of them.

## 2. Towards the Politics of Cultural Diversity?

As the above discussion implies, in multicultural societies like ours we are concerned with two kinds of politics. One is based on thick moral arguments around conceptions of the good, and is appropriate for internal politics of cultural communities. Thus non-liberal cultural communities, for instance, should be able to educate their children in accordance with moral principles held to be valuable within their communities, not with liberal values. The other, which concerns the politics of cultural diversity, and which lacks any thick moral basis or perhaps any moral grounds at all, is to govern the external relations of cultural communities.

It is this second kind of politics which is more controversial. What kind of consensus is possible within multicultural societies? As observed, Rawls suggests a kind of *modus vivendi* which is valued and accepted for moral, not prudential, reasons. However, since such a consensus is based on the liberal conception of the private and public distinction and, therefore, a process which may be experienced as coercion by those who do not define such a separation in the same way, it is open to serious challenge by non-liberal cultures.

Another alternative which is left for the politics of cultural diversity is a *modus vivendi*, i.e. a prudential peace treaty among cultural communities. An objection which is raised by Rawls, as seen in chapter 7, maintains that stability on the *modus vivendi* account is always fragile because a shift in the distribution of power would give a group an incentive to rewrite the terms of the social contract so as to benefit itself.

A guarantee, of course, may not be possible, but then, as Patrick Neal rightly points out, even if it is granted that a Hobbesian *modus vivendi* model would provide no guarantee against this occurrence, it is difficult to see how any other model does provide such a guarantee and why there is reason to believe that the world is not actually like this.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, even if a *modus vivendi* cannot be viewed as intrinsically moral, it is a precondition of moral life. Indeed, what distinguishes Rawlsian overlapping consensus from the *modus vivendi* model is not that the former is necessarily more stable than the latter. The difference lies in the explanation which the former can provide for the undesirability of using forceful assimilation of cultural minorities in moral terms: an explanation which the latter cannot provide, since it is not involved in any moral claim but prudence. Thus, when in a society cultural minorities live alongside a majority and the majority tries to assimilate them by forceful means, since the Rawlsian model is based on some moral

---

<sup>8</sup> P. Neal, 'Vulgar Liberalism', *Political Theory*, Vol. 21, No. 4, November 1993, p.636.



principles it can condemn such assimilation as unjust, whereas the *modus vivendi* cannot.

Although, viewed as such, a Hobbesian *modus vivendi* is not necessarily as fragile as Rawls's argument suggests, it is not clear how it can provide the necessary conditions for a politics of cultural diversity in multicultural societies. It is, at most, a model with the potential to prevent a state of war between rival traditions of moral enquiry. In our search for a political form appropriate to the relations between cultural communities, therefore, we should look for other alternatives.

In order to do so, we may return to Rawls's starting point in his construction of a political theory of justice. Rawls correctly realises that for a consensus between different comprehensive moral, religious or philosophical doctrines, one should go for a political ideal. Where his argument goes wrong, I think, is that in suggesting such a political ideal, he appeals to a conception of justice which is based on a (liberal) moral argument which is too thick to be agreed by other traditions of thought.

What is required, therefore, is an account of the political which is not involved in thick moral arguments. There are arguments which have been offered in this respect. They try to provide models which distance themselves from thick moral arguments and move towards more political ideals. The civil association model and the republican ideal, both of which will be

considered below, though very briefly, are among such arguments.

The 'civil association' model proposed by Michael Oakeshott in *On Human Conduct* can be very illuminating for this purpose. In his discussion of *universitas* and *societas*, Oakeshott argues that whereas the former represents a model of association of agents engaged in a common enterprise defined by a purpose, the latter (which he calls civil association) designates a formal relationship in terms of rules:

The idea *societas* is that of agents who, by choice or circumstance, are related to one another so as to compose an identifiable association of a certain sort. The tie which joins them, and in respect of which each recognizes himself to be *socius*, is not that of engagement in an enterprise to pursue a common substantive purpose or to promote a common interest, but that of loyalty to one another.<sup>9</sup>

Therefore, one can think of constructing an alternative model starting by an

idea of association not in terms of affection, of a choice to be related in the pursuit of a common substantive purpose, or of conscription in such an enterprise, and not that of self-moved bargainers negotiating with one another for the satisfaction of their egoistic or altruistic wants, but solely in terms of a practice or language of intercourse.<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> M. Oakeshott, *On Human Conduct* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), p. 201.  
<sup>10</sup> Ibid. p. 182.

There is always a possibility that the contracting parties recognise that contract, not only as the only way to maintain a system of peace and order, but also a means to secure the necessary conditions for civil life (practice of civility), the absence of which would undermine the very existence of cultural communities themselves and, therefore, be willing to stay in the contract. In our search for a politics of cultural diversity, therefore, we may think of a political association of cultural communities. It will be a relation in which cultural communities are related to one another in the acknowledgement of the authority of certain conditions in acting.

It is less evident, however, that Oakeshott's model can stay out of the sphere of cultural disagreements. His references to 'the certain conditions in acting', 'the practice or the language of intercourse', 'the practice of civility', and more explicitly, the authority of the law, all are involved and presuppose the presence of a certain culture, i.e. the European culture. This, of course, is consistent with other parts of his discussion since for Oakeshott every society has a specific history and character, which necessarily shapes the form and content of its political discourse and political institutions rest on no other foundations than the historically acquired and contingent human dispositions.

It is exactly for this reason that the third part of Oakeshott's argument in *On Human Conduct* is concerned with

the origins of the state in Europe. It is assumed that there are rules which govern the practice of civility which are embodied in the common culture of Europe and can be appealed to in state policy making. Moreover, there is an understanding of civility which is viewed as shared within this culture. For Oakshott, the authority of *respublica* is a result of a slow and painful historical process. European state took centuries to establish a single legitimate and generally acknowledged structure of authority within their territorial boundaries. In viewing the European culture as homogenous, however, the cultural diversity within European community is not given enough weight in his argument.

Although such a line of argument certainly requires further development, it seems to indicate a fruitful path. In order to pursue this point a little further, I shall explain here, very briefly, two discussions which have recently been developed, each in a different direction, by appealing to the Oakshottian idea of civil association by John Gray and Chantal Mouffe. Gray recognises that the existing cultural diversity within modern societies undermines the universality of a liberal regime as the only legitimate one for mankind and, therefore, argues for a model of civil society which is "tolerant of the diversity of views, religious and political, that it contains and in which the state does not seek to impose on all any comprehensive doctrine" and, therefore, it is there that "diverse, incompatible and perhaps incommensurable

conceptions of the world and the good can coexist in a peaceful *modus vivendi*".<sup>11</sup> For Gray, liberty is to be understood in negative terms as a condition, status or sphere of action protected from interference. "For us", he argues, "negative liberty is an essential, constitutive condition of autonomy, with the autonomous institutions of civil society supplying the array of choiceworthy options which are autonomy's other constitutive condition."<sup>12</sup> Therefore, as far as cultural diversity is concerned, Gray believes in a cultural *laissez-faire*, i.e. that every individual should be free to choose his or her way of life in a fair competition between several of them: an argument which has been criticised by B. Parekh as inappropriate for the politics of cultural diversity. Parekh rightly argues that, in postulating culturally unattached individuals freely choosing their way of life in a kind of cultural supermarket, Gray has misunderstood both the individual, who is of necessity a cultural being, and culture, which cannot be chosen except from within a specific culture. Moreover, "[l]ike the libertarian project of economic *laissez-faire*, Gray's cultural *laissez-faire* presupposes an authoritarian state constantly attending to its necessary background conditions and correcting its unacceptable outcomes".<sup>13</sup> Parekh also underlines the important fact that in contemporary western

---

<sup>11</sup> J. Gray, *Post-Liberalism* (London: Routledge, 1993), pp.314-315.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid* p.322.

<sup>13</sup> B. Parekh, 'Cultural Diversity and Liberal Democracy' in D. Beetham (ed.), *Defining and Measuring Democracy* (London: Sage, 1994), p.206. For an interesting critical discussion on both Mouffe and Gray, Cf. N. O'Sullivan 'Postmodernism, difference, and the concept of the political' ( article prepared for Studies in Humanities and Social Sciences, 1995).

societies, the liberal way of life is embodied in all the major legal, economic, political and other institutions and enjoys political, legal, economic power and cultural prestige. Consequently, in a competition with it, non-liberal ways of life start off with severe material and psychological disadvantages.<sup>14</sup>

Of more importance to my discussion here is Gray's conception of the civil society. As Walzer's argument on thick and thin morality implies, what is required here is a conception of the political which is distinguishable from thick moral arguments. It seems to me, that Gray's essentially liberal model of civil society has not distinguished itself sufficiently from thick moral principles and, therefore, lacks the necessary conditions for being used in the formation of political relations between cultural communities.

It is in this respect that Mouffe's argument seems to have merit over both Oakeshott's and Gray's discussions. Like Gray, Mouffe believes that, "Oakeshott's idea of the civil association as *societas* is adequate to define political association under modern democratic conditions" and, therefore, "[i]t is a form of association that can be enjoyed among relative strangers belonging to many purposive associations and whose allegiances to specific communities are not seen as conflicting with their membership of the civil association."<sup>15</sup> She points out, however,

---

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid* p.206

<sup>15</sup> C. Mouffe. *The Return of the Political* (London and New York: Verso, 1993), p. 67.

that what is missing in Oakeshott's is division and antagonism. In order to appropriate his notion of *societas*, therefore, she believes, we should appeal to Carl Schmitt's argument on the conception of the political according to which the criterion of the political is the friend/enemy relation.<sup>16</sup> For him, the political is concerned with the realm of decision, not free discussion. To be useful for the elaboration of a modern political philosophy, therefore, the concept of regime must make room for the ideal of division and struggle, for the friend/enemy relation.<sup>17</sup> Mouffe suggests then that,

Once we recognize that fact, we can begin thinking about democratic politics and political philosophy in a different way. What we should aim for in a modern democracy is the political creation of a unity through common *identification* with a particular interpretation of its political principles, a specific understanding of citizenship.<sup>18</sup>

As can be observed, however, like the two other arguments, we are involved here again with a conception of civil association which is culturally circumstanced. Those who do not share such an understanding of citizenship, therefore, are inevitably considered as 'others'.

Apart from the civil association model, another alternative to the liberal position is what can be broadly called the

---

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 68-69.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p.114.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p.115.

republican view of citizenship. David Miller's argument in his 'Citizenship and Pluralism' is an interesting example in this respect.<sup>19</sup> Miller begins his argument with pointing out the fact that members of public in democratic societies in the West do not understand citizenship as defined entirely by their legal rights and obligations, but "recognize an ethical element in citizenship as well, an idea of what it *should* imply for social and political practice."<sup>20</sup> Moreover, theoretical disagreement about the meaning of citizenship is reflected in popular understandings of the idea. According to Miller, by the emergence of radical cultural pluralism, those liberal conceptions of citizenship which are based on a common civilisation are open to criticism:

If there is no longer a shared 'common heritage' or 'way of life' by reference to which citizens' rights can be defined, how are we to arrive at the conception of social justice that defines citizenship?<sup>21</sup>

But what about liberal theories such as Rawls's which respect such diversity? Miller regards Rawls's theory as the paradigm of a liberal theory of citizenship developed in response to the challenge of pluralism but argues that although in a liberal society there are likely to be many people whose personal identities are themselves unencumbered and, therefore, for them

---

<sup>19</sup> D. Miller, 'Citizenship and Pluralism', Political Studies, Vol. 43, No. 3, 1995.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 434.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p.435.



adopting the citizenship perspective costs nothing because the view of the person they are required to take up is more or less the one they already hold, there are also people whose personal identities are encumbered and, for them, to adopt the citizen perspective is already to concede a good deal.<sup>22</sup> The liberal conception of citizenship, therefore, does not constitute a fully adequate response to cultural pluralism.

According to Miller, the alternative which provides a better solution is the republican conception of citizenship which “conceives the citizen as someone who plays an active role in shaping the future direction of his or her society through political debate and decision-making.”<sup>23</sup> He claims that unlike the liberal view, the republican conception of citizenship places no limits on what sort of demand may be put forward in the political forum and, therefore, does not discriminate between demands for personal conviction (e.g. animal rights) or group identity (e.g. religious schooling).<sup>24</sup> A citizen identifies with the political community to which he or she belongs, and is committed to promoting the community’s common good through active participation in its political life.

The question which comes to mind, however, is what conception of reason or rationality lies behind the republican idea of a general will? “The republican solution”, Miller replies,

---

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 438.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 443.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 447.

“involves, paradoxically, the search for a higher level of agreement between individuals and social groups, but it aims to achieve this in a more pragmatic way, through the give and take of politics.”<sup>25</sup> It does not require participants to subscribe to any fixed principles other than those implicit in political dialogue itself: “a willingness to argue and to listen to reasons given by others, abstention from violence and coercion, and so forth.”<sup>26</sup> Miller, however, accepts that the republican view alienates some groups from citizenship. For instance, religious believers who hold that trafficking with the secular world compromises their faith cannot be regarded as full citizens from the republican perspective. But whereas on the liberal view they are excluded *a priori* from citizenship, the only demand that the republican view makes is that they should try to persuade others of the rightness of their case. “The contrast between republicanism and liberalism”, therefore, “is not that the liberal recognizes the value of entrenched rights whereas the republican does not, but that the liberal regards these rights as having a pre-political justification while the republican grounds them in public discussion.”<sup>27</sup>

However, it seems to be very difficult that such public discussions can avoid controversies which stem from moral and cultural difference. If it is to be undertaken in the parliament or

---

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p.450.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p.450.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p.449.

media, for instance, it is difficult to see how they can reach agreements without engaging in arguments which concern the existing diversity between different traditions of moral enquiry and, the difference between different rationalities behind them. Miller seems to be right that the republican view can be more helpful in finding solutions for cultural diversity than the liberal view. But here again, it has to appeal to a sort of commonality, to "reasons which are generally accepted in the political community"<sup>28</sup> and, therefore, what is required is "a common sense of nationality [which] is an essential background to politics of this kind"<sup>29</sup>, the existence of which has been questioned by the proponents of multiculturalism. Perhaps it is for this reason that Miller acknowledges that "republican citizenship cannot accommodate everything that passes under the name of 'the politics of identity'."<sup>30</sup> Thus everything will depend on whether the demand can be linked to principles that are generally accepted among the citizen body. If the existing policy were to be based on the principle that all formal education must be secular in character, for instance, Muslims' demands for Islamic schools might well be rejected in a democratic forum. As can be seen, then, the outcome of the republican decision-making process in this respect does not differ very much from the liberal alternative in respect to cultural difference and therefore, is of little help in

---

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, pp.445-446.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. pp.449-450.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. p.446.

resolving problems which concern extensive cultural diversity.

In sum, the two arguments which have been mentioned above, i.e. the civil association and the republican arguments, attempt to provide political models which are free from thick moral arguments. How successfully can they deal with cultural pluralism, however, is open to question. There are points of divergence and convergence between both views. Although they both argue for a political model, the legitimacy of state policies in the civil association model derives from law whereas in the republican model it stems from dialogue. However, in practice both of them are morally and culturally committed as the former appeals to European institutions, a culturally particular and thick notion of liberty, or identification with a particular interpretation of democracy and specific understanding of citizenship; and the latter relies upon the republican understanding of citizenship which is based on a common sense of nationality: grounds which are not shared by all cultural communities and, therefore, will not serve the proposed goals of these theories for the cultural diversity of contemporary world.

The analysis of the two models, therefore, indicates that to stay out of the space of cultural disagreement is hopeless. This leads us to MacIntyre's conclusions, as observed in chapter 3, about the nature of moral disagreement of our time. Thus, even if we acknowledge, as Walzer proposes, the existence of thin moral

principles by appealing to which the relations between (radically) diverse cultural communities can be formed, the comprehension of the content of such principles seems far too difficult to reach for us since, as MacIntyre's argument indicates, different cultures produce different traditions of moral enquiry each of which appeals to a different rationality. It reveals how difficult the way towards a politics of cultural diversity is. It reveals at the same time the inevitability of undertaking further investigation: a task which falls well beyond the limits of this dissertation.

## Bibliography

As-Sadr, M. B. *Our Philosophy*. trans. Shams C. Inati (London: The Muhammadi Trust and KPI Ltd, 1987)

Avineri, S. & De-Shalit, A. (eds.), *Communitarianism and Individualism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992)

Baker, J. (ed.), *Group Rights* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994)

Baumeister, A. 'Political Liberalism, Education and Pluralism'. Paper presented at Political Theory Seminar, Department of Politics, University of Hull, 1994

Baynes, K., Bohman, J. & MacCarthy, T. (eds.), *After Philosophy: End or Transformation?* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT, 1987)

Beetham, D. (ed.), *Defining and Measuring Democracy* (London: Sage, 1994)

Beheshti, M & Bahonar, M. J. *Philosophy of Islam*. trans. M. A. Ansari (Karachi: Islamic Seminary of Pakistan, 1990)

Bell, D. *Communitarianism and Its Critics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993)

Benn, S. & Gaus, G. (eds.), *Private and Public in Social Life* (London: Croom Helm, 1983)

Berlin, I. 'Two Concepts of Liberty' in *Four Essays on Liberty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969)

Black, A. 'Classical Islam and Medieval Europe: A Comparison of Political Philosophies and Cultures'. *Political Studies*. Vol. XLI, No. 1. March 1993

Brown, C. (ed.), *Political reconstructing in Europe* (London: Routledge, 1994)

- Caney, S. 'Consequentialist Defences of Liberal Neutrality', *The Philosophical Quarterly* Vol. 41, No. 165, 1991
- Carens, J. 'Complex Justice, Culture, and Politics' in D. Miller & M. Walzer (eds.), *Pluralism, Justice, And Equality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995)
- Chrysside, G. 'Britain's Changing Faiths: Adaptation in a New Environment' in G. Parsons (ed.), *The Growth of Religious Diversity* (London: Routledge, 1994), Vol. II
- Cohen, M. 'How do we make citizens?' *Times Literary Supplement* February 23 1996
- Crystal, D. (ed.), *The Cambridge Encyclopaedia*. (2nd edition) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994)
- Dworkin, G. *The Theory and Practice of Autonomy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988)
- Dworkin, R. 'Liberalism' in *A Matter of Principle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985)
- Dworkin, R. *A Matter of Principle* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985)
- Dworkin, R. 'Foundations of Liberal Equality' in G. Petersen (ed.), *The Turner Lectures on Human Values* Vol. II (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1990)
- D'Entreves, M. P. 'Communitarianism and the Question of Toleration'. *Journal of Social Philosophy*. Vol. XXI, No.1, Spring 1990
- The New Encyclopaedia Britannica* (15th edition) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), Vol. 16
- Fraser, N. 'Multiculturalism and Gender Equality: The U.S. "Difference" Debates Revisited'. *Constellations* Vol. 3, No. 1, 1996
- Fustel De Coulanges, N. D. *The Ancient City* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980)

Galeotti, A. E. 'Citizenship and Equality'. *Political Theory*. Vol. 21. No. 4, November 1993

Galston, W. A. 'Community, Democracy, Philosophy: The Political Philosophy of Michael Walzer'. *Political Theory* Vol.17. No. 1, 1989

Galston, W. *Liberal Purposes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991)

Graham, G. 'MacIntyre's Fusion of History and Philosophy' in J. Horton & S. Mendus (eds.), *After MacIntyre* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1994)

Gray, J. *Liberalism* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1986)

Gray, J. *Post-Liberalism* (London: Routledge, 1993)

*The Guardian*. Friday December 15 1995

*The Guardian Weekend*. 30 December 1995

Gutmann, A. (ed.), *Multiculturalism and 'The Politics of Recognition'* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992)

Gutmann, A. 'The Challenge of Multiculturalism in Political Ethics'. *Philosophy and Public Affairs*. Summer 1993, Vol 22, No. 3. p. 171

Hampshire, S. 'Public and Private Morality' in S. Hampshire (ed.), *Public and Private Morality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978)

Horton, J. (ed), *Liberalism, Multiculturalism and Toleration* (London: MacMillan, 1993)

Horton, J. 'Introduction' in J. Horton (ed.), *Liberalism, Multiculturalism and Toleration* (London: Macmillan, 1993)

Horton, J. and Crabtree, H. (eds.), *Toleration and Integrity in a Multi-Faith Society* (York: University of York 1992)

Horton, J. & Mendus, S. (eds.), *After MacIntyre* (Oxford: Polity



Press. 1994)

Hurka, T. 'Indirect Perfectionism: Kymlicka on Liberal Neutrality'. *The Journal Of Political Philosophy*, Vol. 3, No.1, March 1995

Kymlicka, W. *Liberalism, Community and Culture* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989)

Kymlicka, W. *Contemporary Political Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991)

Kymlicka, W. 'Individual and Community Rights' in J. Baker (ed.). *Group Rights* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994)

Kymlicka, W. *Multicultural Citizenship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995)

Larmore, C. *Patterns of Moral Complexity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987)

Lord Scarman, *The Brixton Disorders 10-12 April 1981* (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1986)

MacIntyre, A. 'Epistemological Crisis, Dramatic Narrative and The Philosophy of Science'. *The Monist* 69, 1977

MacIntyre, A. *After Virtue* (London: Duckworth, 1985)

MacIntyre, A. 'Relativism, Power and Philosophy' reprinted in K. Baynes, J. Bohman & T. MacCarthy (eds.). *After Philosophy: End or Transformation?* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT, 1987)

MacIntyre, A. *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (London: Duckworth, 1988)

MacIntyre, A. *Three Versions Of Moral Enquiry* (London: Duckworth, 1990)

MacIntyre, A. 'letter' to *The Responsive Community* (Summer 1991), p.91

MacIntyre, A. 'An interview with Alasdair MacIntyre'. *COGITO*.

Summer 1991

MacIntyre, A. 'A Partial Response to my Critics' in J. Horton & S. Mendus (eds.) *After MacIntyre* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1994)

MacIntyre, A. 'The Spectre of Communitarianism', *Radical Philosophy*, 70. March/April 1995

MacIntyre, A. *Marxism & Christianity* (2nd edition) (London: Duckworth, 1995)

Mansbridge, J. J. *Beyond Adversary Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983)

Mason, A. 'Liberalism and the Value of Community', *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 23, No. 2. June 1993

Mendus, S. *Toleration and the Limits of Liberalism* (London: Macmillan, 1989)

Miller, D. 'Introduction' in D. Miller & M. Walzer (eds.), *Pluralism, Justice, and Equality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995)

Miller, D. & Walzer, M. (eds.), *Pluralism, Justice, and Equality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995)

Modood, T. 'Establishment, Multiculturalism and British Citizenship'. *The Political Quarterly*, 1994

Mouffe, C. *The Return of the Political* (London and New York: Verso, 1993)

Mulhall, S. & Swift, A. *Liberals and Communitarians* (2nd ed.) (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996)

Neal, P. 'Vulgar Liberalism'. *Political Theory*, Vol. 21, No. 4, November 1993

Nicholson, L. 'To Be or Not To Be: Charles Taylor and the Politics of Recognition'. *Constellations* Vol. 3, No. 1, 1996

- Oakeshott, M. *On Human Conduct* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957)
- O'Sullivan, N. 'Postmodernism, difference, and the concept of the political' (Article prepared for Studies in Humanities and Social Sciences, 1995)
- Parekh, B. 'Britain and the Social Logic of Pluralism' in B. Parekh (ed.) *Britain: A Plural Society* (London: CRE, 1990)
- Parekh, B. (ed.). *Britain: A Plural Society* (London: CRE, 1990)
- Parekh, B. (ed.). *Law, Blasphemy and the Multi-Faith Society, Britain: A Plural Society, and Free Speech* (London: Commission for Racial Equality, 1990)
- Parekh, B. 'The Rushdie Affair: Research Agenda for Political Philosophy'. *Political Studies*, 38 (1990)
- Parekh, B. *The Concept of Fundamentalism* (Warwick: The University Press, 1991)
- Parekh, B. 'Superior people: The narrowness of liberalism from Mill to Rawls'. *Times Literary Supplement* February 25, 1994
- Parekh, B. 'Cultural Diversity and Liberal Democracy' in D. Beetham (ed.). *Defining and Measuring Democracy* (London: Sage, 1994)
- Parekh, B. 'Moral Philosophy and its Anti-pluralist Bias' in *Philosophy and Pluralism*, Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement: 40, 1996
- Parsons, G. (ed.). *The Growth of Religious Diversity* (London: Routledge, 1994). Vol. II
- Pateman, C. *Participation and Democratic Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970)
- Pateman, C. 'Feminist Critiques of the Public/Private Dichotomy' in S. Benn & G. Gaus (eds.) *Private and Public in Social Life* (London: Croom Helm, 1983)

- Peterman, L. 'Privacy's Background', *The Review of Politics*, Vol. 55, Spring 1993, No. 2
- Petersen, G. (ed.), *The Turner Lectures on Human Values* Vol. II (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1990)
- Plant, R. 'Community' in *The Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Political Thought* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987)
- Poulters, S. 'Cultural Pluralism and its Limits: A Legal Perspective' in B. Parekh (ed.), *Britain: A Plural Society* (London: CRE, 1990)
- Raphael, D. D. *Problems of Political Philosophy* (London: Macmillan, 1976)
- Rasmussen, D. (ed.), *Universalism vs. Communitarianism* (Mass.: MIT, 1990)
- Rawls, J. *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard University press, 1971)
- Rawls, J. *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993)
- Raz, J. *The Morality of Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986)
- Raz, J. 'Multiculturalism: A Liberal Perspective'. *Dissent*, Winter 1994
- Rex, J. *The Ghetto and the Underclass* (Aldershot: Avebury, 1988)
- Rorty, A. O. 'The Hidden Politics of Cultural Identification', *Political Theory*, Vol. 22, No. 1, February 1994
- Rorty, R., Schneewind, J. B. and Skinner, Q. (eds.), *Philosophy in History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984)
- Rosenblum, N. (ed.), *Liberalism and Moral Life* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989)
- Rouner, L. S. 'Introduction' in L. Rouner (ed.), *On Community*

- (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991)
- Rouner, L. (ed.), *On Community* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991)
- Rustin, M. 'Equality in Post-Modern Times' in D. Miller & M. Walzer (eds.), *Pluralism, Justice, and Equality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995)
- Scruton, R. *A Dictionary of Political Thought* (London: Macmillan, 1982)
- Siedentop, L. 'Liberalism: The Christian connection', *Times Literary Supplement* 24-30 March 1989
- Skinner, Q. 'The Idea of Negative Liberty: Philosophical and Historical Perspective', in R. Rorty, J. B. Schneewind and Q. Skinner (eds.), *Philosophy in History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984)
- Spinner, J. *The Boundaries of Citizenship* (Baltimore & London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1994)
- Taylor, B. *Primitive Culture* (London: John Murray, 1871)
- Taylor, C. *Philosophical Papers* (2 vols.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985)
- Taylor, C. *Sources of the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989)
- Taylor, C. 'The Liberal-Communitarian Debate' in N. Rosenblum (ed.), *Liberalism and Moral Life* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989)
- Taylor, C. 'The Rushdie Controversy', *Public Culture*, Vol. 2, No.1, Fall 1989
- Taylor, C. *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1991)
- Taylor, C. 'The Politics of Recognition' in A. Gutmann (ed.),

*Multiculturalism and 'The Politics of Recognition'* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992)

Taylor, C. 'Response' in J. Tully (ed.), *Philosophy in an Age of Pluralism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994)

Taylor, C. 'Justice After Virtue' in J. Horton & S. Mendus (eds.), *After MacIntyre* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1994)

Templeman, S. 'Constructions of Multiculturalism', Paper presented at Critical Legal Conference, School of Law, University of East London, September 1996

Tomasi, J. 'Kymlicka, Liberalism, and Respect for Cultural Minorities', *Ethics* 105

Tully, J. (ed.), *Philosophy in an Age of Pluralism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994)

Waldron, J. 'Theoretical Foundations of Liberalism', *The Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 3, No. 147

Walzer, M. 'Pluralism in Political Perspective' in M. Walzer (ed.), *The Politics of Ethnicity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982)

Walzer, M. (ed.), *The Politics of Ethnicity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982)

Walzer, M. *Spheres of Justice: A Defense of Pluralism and Equality* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983)

Walzer, M. 'Liberalism and the Art of Separation', *Political Theory*, Vol. 12, No. 3, August 1984

Walzer, M. *Interpretation and Social Criticism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985)

Walzer, M. *The Company of Critics: Social Criticism and Political Commitment in the Twentieth Century* (London: Peter Halban, 1988)

Walzer, M. 'The Communitarian Critique of Liberalism', *Political*

*Theory*, Vol.18, No.1, 1990

Walzer, M. 'Comment' in A. Gutmann (ed.), *Multiculturalism and 'The Politics of Recognition'* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992)

Walzer, M. *Thick and Thin: Moral Argument at Home and Abroad* (Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994)

Walzer, M. 'Notes on the new tribalism' in C. Brown (ed.), *Political reconstructing in Europe* (London: Routledge, 1994)

Walzer, Michael. 'Response' in D. Miller & M. Walzer (eds.), *Pluralism, Justice, and Equality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995)

Weinstock, D. M. 'The political theory of strong evaluation' in J. Tully (ed.), *Philosophy in an Age of Pluralism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994)

Wenar, L. 'Political Liberalism: An Internal Critique', *Ethics* 106 (October 1995)

Williams, B. *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (London: Fontana Press, 1985)

Wolf, S. 'Comment' in A. Gutmann (ed.), *Multiculturalism and 'The Politics of Recognition'* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992)