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MULTICULTURALISM: A LIBERAL PERSPECTIVE*

Multiculturalism is a problem today and for the foreseeable future – a problem for politics and the ethics of politics. In this essay I want to explore the implications of the liberal political philosophy. I have faith in for the way contemporary democracies should deal with this problem.

Political philosophy does not provide us with eternally valid theories for the government of all human societies. To my mind political philosophy is time-bound. It is valid – if it is valid at all – for the conditions prevailing here and now. Its conclusions, apply also to similar situations elsewhere. But we cannot set the precise boundaries for their application. There are two reasons for this limitation.

First, it is impossible to articulate comprehensively all the relevant moral considerations we are aware of, and impossible to state in general how much they weigh against each other in situations of conflict. Moral knowledge is practical in a special sense: it is embodied in our practices and acquired by habituation. We often know what to do when faced with the situation in which action is called for, when we could not have known what to do ahead of time. Everything we know can be articulated, can be expressed in words. But it cannot be exhaustively expressed in general abstract formulae. The situation is

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analogous with that of a person who embarks on a journey to a distant destination. Ask him ahead of time to describe the route and he will be unable to do so. Yet as he progresses along the road, he recalls at every stage how to proceed at that point. Not everything we know can we exhaustively state in the abstract. Moral knowledge escapes such formulation, and that means that moral theories are to be taken as mere approximations. Those who apply them inflexibly are fanatics heading for disaster.

The second reason for the fact that political morality is bound to the here and now is that there are limitations to our ability to conceive how society will develop. The problem is not merely due to the complexity of the social conditions that may prevail in the future, a complexity that defeats our ability to apply our principles to those conditions. The problem extends further. Social situations can change in such a way that the concepts we employ to understand them become inapplicable.

I start my reflections with these remarks for two reasons. First, my belief in the contextuality of political theory presupposes value pluralism, which lies at the heart of the problem of multiculturalism. Second, contextuality highlights the complicated relations of contemporary liberalism to its classical ancestry. That relationship is not one of identity. Seventeenth and Eighteenth-century liberalism was, by and large, right for its time and place. Those of us who adhere today to liberalism should do so not by following the theories of Locke or Kant, but by looking for contemporary theories, valid for our own conditions, which descend in spirit from the classical texts. This is important for a reflection on the importance of community for individual wellbeing.

The migration of labor familiar since the rise of capitalism, and accelerated to undreamt of proportions by the combined effect of contemporary mass media, rapid communication, and easy transportation, has led to unprecedented levels of communal disintegration and individual alienation. The Nineteenth – century bourgeoisie reacted to the migrations from the country to the cities by developing a rich urban culture, a culture of anonymity and bureaucratic impartiality. This is the culture we are all children of, a culture in which people resent charity and insist on entitlements to social services and benefits financed by strangers whom they never meet, and administered by faceless officials. Ours is a culture in which we feel more comfortable on a beach, in a park, a restaurant, or in a concert hall bustling with strangers, observing them as they observe us, than on a

lonely beach or an empty restaurant. We feel at ease in an apartment building served by elevators that keep its residents unseen by each other, and we feel stifled in a closely knit local community where everyone knows us, and where every deviation from our daily routine and every one of our visitors is closely observed by our neighbors.

The advantages of the culture of urban anonymity are many. But such anonymity is inadequate to cope with the multiculturalism that first emerged in many countries as a by-product of the decolonization movement and is gathering pace all the time. The culture of urban anonymity could absorb individual migrants escaping oppressive or disintegrating societies. It is tempting to exaggerate and say that it was made for such people. But this culture cannot adequately cope with the conditions of today. The threatening results of this failure are subcultures of anomie, alienation from society and its institutions, and the emergence of a growing underclass.

Liberalism has responded to the phenomenon of diversity in three ways. First was the attitude that I will call "toleration"[1]. It consists in letting minorities conduct themselves as they wish without being criminalized, so long as they do not interfere with the culture of the majority. To a considerable degree this meant restriction of the use of public spaces and public media by the minority. It also usually meant that all its activities were to be financed out of the resources of the minority community – in addition to its contribution through taxation to the maintenance of the general culture.

Two types of argument are commonly advanced to support toleration. First, principled reasons for restricting the use of coercion: the Harm Principle, for example, prescribes that people may not be coerced except in order to restrain them from causing harm to others or to punish them for causing harm to others. Arguments of the second type, appeal to considerations of public peace, social harmony, and the legitimation of the system of government, all of which may be jeopardized by the resentment of minorities that are not allowed to continue with their religious and cultural activities.

Toleration was eventually supplemented, perhaps even supplanted, by a second liberal policy toward minorities-one based on the assertion of an individual right against discrimination on national, racial, ethnic, or religious grounds, or on grounds of gender or sexual orientation. Nondiscrimination rights are a natural extension of

[1] I do not mean to suggest that the concept of toleration cannot be applied to other policies. I have offered a more comprehensive analysis of toleration in *The Morality of Freedom*, cit. Here I use the term to capture the spirit of one fairly familiar attitude toward minorities.

the classical liberal conception of constitutional civil and political rights. They also fit that strand of liberalism made popular by the writings of John Rawls, according to which the principles used to justify political action should make no reference to any specific conception of the good life.

Nondiscrimination rights go well beyond toleration. They have far-reaching consequences that affect the way the majority community leads its own life. Most obviously, it is no longer free to exclude members of the minority from its schools, places of employment, residential neighborhoods, and so on. Usually nondiscrimination rights are interpreted to allow each community control over certain institutions. They also normally tolerate a measure of discrimination in one's private dealings. But under a regime of scrupulous nondiscrimination a country's public services, its educational system, and its economic and political arenas are no longer the preserve of the majority, but common to all its members as individuals.

The third liberal approach to the problem of minorities is the affirmation of multiculturalism. It is advanced as suitable in those societies in which there are several stable cultural communities both wishing and able to perpetuate themselves. It does not apply to countries that receive many immigrants from diverse cultures, but where those from each culture are few in number or, even if numerous, do not wish to keep their separate identity. Perhaps even their very migration to the host country is an expression of their rejection of the culture or group from which they emigrated. Finally, multiculturalism should not be-pursued regarding cultural groups that have lost their ability to perpetuate themselves. This could happen where the ossification of their culture and the allure of the surrounding cultures mean that the vast majority of their young people wish to assimilate into the majority culture.

In the rest of this essay, I will use "multiculturalism" to refer to a society in which the conditions set out in the previous paragraph obtain, and also to a policy of saying yes to this situation. It is important to distinguish two types of multicultural societies. In one, the different communities live mainly in separate geographical regions (for example, the Inuits in Canada and the Scots in Britain). In the other, there is in the main no geographical separateness. For the most part the different communities share the same public places and common services, and they mix in workplaces and in leisure facilities. It is this second condition that characterizes societies whose multiculturalism is relatively recent,

resulting from the ever-growing migrations of the modern era. This essay focuses on the second type, that of multiculturalism without territorial separation.

The policy of multiculturalism differs from that which relies exclusively on nondiscrimination rights in rejecting the individualistic bias of the latter. While endorsing nondiscrimination rights, multiculturalism 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.

Given those beliefs, multiculturalism requires a political society to recognize the equal standing of all the stable and viable cultural communities existing in that society. This implies the need for multicultural political societies to reconceive themselves. There is no room for talk of a minority problem or of a majority tolerating the minorities. A political society, a state, consists – if it is multicultural – of diverse communities and belongs to none of them. Although the relative size of the different communities affects the solutions to conflicts over resources and public spaces among them, none of them should be allowed to see the state as its own, or to think that the others enjoy their standing on sufferance.

The purpose of my remaining discussion is to elaborate and defend this brief description of multiculturalism. I will do so from a liberal perspective. Not everyone in the liberal camp – if I may call it that – will agree to these views. Liberal doubts about multiculturalism stem from three main sources: first, there is the view of liberalism as the bastion of individual, freedom, and correspondingly a fear that multiculturalism supports the power of communities to hold on to reluctant members against their will. Second, there is the view of the superiority of the secular, democratic, European culture, and a reluctance to admit equal rights to inferior oppressive religious cultures, or ones whose cultural values are seen as limited and less developed. Why should liberals give succor to cultures based on the repudiation of liberal values? Finally, there is the fear that a common culture is the cement of society and that without it society will fall apart. I will first state briefly the liberal case for multiculturalism and then deal with these three objections.

The brief argument is that denial of multiculturalism in today's Western societies, far from keeping liberal ideals pure, leads to their

degeneration into what might be called "supermarket liberalism". Before I venture a brief explanation, I would like to clarify the spirit underlying my observations. It is not one of utopian hope. It is not one of a vision of the great future liberalism holds the key to, a future in which the noblest human hopes will come to fruition. It is the spirit of pessimism nourished by perception of conflict as inevitable, and its resolution as less than ideal, regardless of who wins.

1. The Case for Multiculturalism

Liberalism is a political morality that arises out of a view of the good of people, a view that emphasizes the value of freedom to individual well-being. Liberalism upholds the value of being in charge of one's life, charting its course by one's own successive choices. Much liberal thought has explored the ways in which restrictions on individual choices, whether legal or social, can be removed and obstacles to choice – due to poverty, lack of education, or other limitations on access to goods – overcome. It was also common once, though not now, to distinguish freedom and license. Freedom, said Spinoza, Kant, and others, is conduct in accord with rational laws. License is arbitrary choice, in disregard of reason. The slogan that freedom is not license was often abused, and abused to impose unreasonable restrictions on freedom. I believe, however, that when correctly understood, this view is right. Moreover, once it is reinstated and its implications understood, the justification of multiculturalism becomes obvious.

The claim that freedom is action in accordance with reason is a consequence of the fact that freedom presupposes the availability of options to choose from, and that options – all except the very elementary ones – have an internal structure, an inner logic with witch we must comply in order to exercise our freedom. A simple illustration will make the point. One cannot play chess by doing what one wants, that is, by moving the rook diagonally. One can only play chess by following the rules of chess. Having to do so may look like a limitation of freedom to a child. But that is the tempting illusion of license. In fact, complying with the rules of chess and of other options is a precondition of freedom, an inescapable part of its realization.

Of course, games are unlike the practice of medicine or law, the profession of teaching, or the role of parents, spouses, friends, and so on. Relative to the options that make up the core of our lives they are simple and tend to be governed by explicit rules. The options that make up the core of our lives are complex and multidimensional,

rely on complex unstated conventions, and allow extensive room for variation and improvisation. One doctor's bedside manner is not like another's. But there are things which every doctor should do, one way or another, and others no doctor may do. And so on.

Freedom depends on options that depend on rules that constitute those options. The next stage in the argument shows that options presuppose a culture. They presuppose shared meanings and common practices. Why so? – the child may ask – why must I play chess as it is known to our culture, rather than invent my own game? Indeed, the wise parent will answer, there is nothing to stop you from inventing your own game. But this is only possible because inventing one's own games is an activity recognized by our culture with its own form and meaning. What you cannot do is invent everything in your life. Why not? the child will persist, as children do. The answer is essentially that we cannot be children all the time. It is impossible to conduct one's life on the basis of explicit and articulated rules. The density of our activities, their multiplicity of dimensions make it impossible to consider and decide deliberately on all of them. A lot has to be done, so to speak, automatically. But to fit into a pattern that automatic aspect of behavior has to be guided, to be directed and channeled into a coherent meaningful whole. Here then is the argument.

The core options that give meaning to our lives – the different occupations we can pursue, the friendships and relationships we can have, the loyalties and commitments that we attract and develop, the cultural, sporting, or other interests we develop – are all dense webs of complex actions and interactions. They are open only to those who master them, but their complexity and the density of their details defy explicit learning or comprehensive articulation. They are available only to those who have or can acquire practical knowledge of them, that is, knowledge embodied in social practices and transmitted by habituation.

So far I have been talking of social practices that constitute options as if they come one by one. The reality is different. Social practices are interlaced with each other. The practices of parenting intersect with those of other social relationships. Not only do many people move naturally from one role to another, but even where such transitions are not expected the different family roles are, at least, in part defined by analogy and contrast to each other. Similarly with occupations. Our common ways of distinguishing groups of them, such as the professions, clerical jobs, those belonging to trade and commerce, the caring professions, and so on, are each marked by common and

overlapping practices. This commonality of interlocking, practices making up the range of life options open to anyone socialized into them is what cultures are. Small wonder, then, that membership in cultural groups is of vital importance to individuals.

Only through being socialized in a culture can one tap the options that give life a meaning. By and large, one's cultural membership determines the horizon of one's opportunities, of what one may become, or (if one is older) what one might have been. Little surprise that it is in the interest of every person to be fully integrated in a cultural group. Equally plain is the importance to its members of the prosperity, cultural and material, of that group. Its prosperity contributes to the richness and variety of the opportunities they have access to. This is the first of three ways in which membership in a cultural group affects one's prospects in life.

The second is the fact that a common culture facilitates social relations and is a condition of rich and comprehensive personal relationships[2]. One particular relationship is especially sensitive to this point. Erotic attraction, economic, or certain raw emotional needs can often help overcome even the greatest cultural gaps. But in one's relations with one's children and with one's parents, a common culture is an essential condition for the tight bonding we expect and desire. A policy that forcibly detaches children from the culture of their parents not only undermines the stability of society by undermining people's ability to sustain long-term intimate relations, it also threatens one of the deepest desires of most parents, the desire to understand their children, share their world, and to remain close to them.

Finally, being a member of a prosperous cultural community affects individual wellbeing because, for most people, membership is a major determinant of their sense of who they are; it contributes to what we have come to call their sense of identity. This is not really surprising given that one's culture sets the horizon of one's opportunities. I am what I am, but equally I am what I can become or could have been. To understand a person we need to know how that person came to be what he or she is, that is, to understand what she might have been and why she is some of those things and not others. In this way culture constitutes identity. Slighting my culture, holding it up for ridicule, denying its value, and so on, hurts me and offends my

[2] This point does not suggest that people belonging to two nations, or two social classes, say a French or a Dutch person, cannot be friends. What I am suggesting is that there is a considerable common cultural background to people from diverse but culturally neighboring groups.

dignity. It is particularly offensive if the slight bears the imprimatur of my state or of the majority or official culture of my country.

So this is the case for multiculturalism. It is a case that recognizes that cultural groups are not susceptible to reductive analysis in terms of individual actions or states of mind. 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. Because individual freedom and well-being depend on unimpeded membership in a respected and prosperous cultural group, there is little wonder that multiculturalism emerges as a central element in any decent liberal political program for societies inhabited by a number of viable cultural groups.

2. The Dialectics of Pluralism

One of the difficulties in making multiculturalism politically acceptable stems from the enmity between members of different cultural groups, especially when they inhabit one and the same country. Such enmity is quite universal. Even when relations between two communities are at their most amicable, they are accompanied by disapproval of the other culture for its decadence or vulgarity, for lack of a sense of humor, for its treatment of women, or something else. It would be comforting to think that such enmity is sometimes justified, and in the other cases it is due to ignorance and bigotry that can be eradicated. I believe, however, that this optimism is unwarranted, and that conflict is endemic to multiculturalism.

It is, in fact, endemic to value pluralism in all its forms. Value pluralism is the view that many different activities and incompatible forms of life are valuable. Two values are incompatible if they cannot be realized or pursued to the fullest degree in a single life. In this sense value pluralism is a familiar mundane phenomenon. One cannot be both a sprinter and a long-distance runner, far they require the development of different physical abilities and also tend to suit different psychological types. Philosophers do not make good generals, and generals do not make good philosophers. One cannot pursue both the contemplative and the active life, and so on.

The mutual exclusivity of valuable activities and ways of life is a commonplace. It becomes philosophically significant the moment one rejects the belief in the reducibility of all values to one value that serves as a common denominator to all the valuable ways of life. In

our day and age, the reduction is most commonly to the value of feeling happy, or having one's desires satisfied. Value pluralism is the doctrine that denies that such a reduction is possible. It takes the plurality of valuable activities and ways of life to be ultimate and ineliminable. This radically changes our understanding of pluralism. On a reductive-monistic view, when one trades the pleasures (and anxieties) of family life for a career as a sailor one is hoping to get the same thing one is giving up, be it happiness, pleasure, or something else. So long as one plans correctly and succeeds in carrying out one's plans, there is no loss of any kind. One gives up the lesser pleasure one would derive from a family for the greater pleasure of life at sea. If value pluralism is correct, this view is totally wrong. What one loses is of a different kind from what one gains. Even in success there is a loss, and quite commonly there is no meaning to the judgment that one gains more than one loses. When one was faced with valuable options and successfully chose one of them, then one simply chose one way of life rather than another, both being good and not susceptible to comparison of degree.

Theoretically, this plurality of valuable ways of life need not manifest itself in the same society. We may value the culture of the classical Greeks without its opportunities being options for us. But typically in our day and age, pluralism exists within every society, indeed, within every culture. That generates conflict among incompatible activities and ways of life. When valuable alternatives are remote and unavailable, they do not threaten our commitment to and confidence in the values manifested in our own life. But when they are available to us and pursued by others in our vicinity, they tend to be felt as a threat. I chose *A over B*, but was I right? Skills and character traits cherished by my way of life are a handicap for those pursuing one or another of its alternatives. I value long contemplation and patient examination: these are the qualities I require in my chosen course. Their life, by contrast, requires impetuosity, swift responses, and decisive action, and they despise the slow contemplative types as indecisive. They almost have to. To succeed in their chosen way, they have to be committed to it and to believe that the virtues it requires should be cultivated. They therefore cannot regard those others as virtues for them. By the same token it is only natural that they will value in others what they choose to emulate themselves. Hence, we have a variety of dismissive attitudes to the virtues of the competing ways of life.

Conflict is endemic. Of course, pluralists can step back from their personal commitments and appreciate in the abstract the value of oth-

er ways of life. But this acknowledgment coexists with, and cannot replace, the feelings of rejection and dismissiveness. Tension is an inevitable concomitant of value pluralism. And it is a tension without stability, without the prospect of a reconciliation of the two perspectives, the one. recognizing the validity of competing values and the one hostile to them. One is forever moving from one to the other.

3. The Transforming Effect

The inescapable tension between acceptance of and rivalry with competing valuable ways of life, which forever threatens to destabilize it, is common to all forms of value pluralism, where incompatible options coexist in the same society. This tension exists in homogeneous as well as in multicultural societies. Admittedly the latter tend to generate a heightened awareness of the tension because they polarize it along cultural-ethnic divides. But it is equally acute in societies with strong class divisions, for example. The next form of the dialectics of pluralism I want to focus on is specific to multiculturalism.

Multiculturalism arises from a break in a relatively homogeneous society. It is a result of the conquest of a territory and the subjugation of its indigenous population, or of large-scale migrations such as the migration of East African Indians to Britain or Turks to the Netherlands. Sometimes it arises as a consequence of political union of people from neighboring, but culturally distinct, countries. In all these cases the constituent cultures face great pressures to change as a result of their interaction with the other groups. Naturally, they wish to resist the pressure. The desire to resist is particularly felt by small communities facing the challenge of coexistence with much larger groups whose cultures dominate the public arena.

The view that I advocate may be expected to be sympathetic to such conservationist trends. After all, the whole idea of multiculturalism is to encourage communities to sustain their own diverse cultures. But although this is so, and although it is of the essence of multiculturalism that different communities should enjoy their fair share of opportunities and resources to maintain and develop their cultures in their own way, multiculturalism, as I see it, is not inherently opposed to change, not even to change induced by coexistence with other cultural groups. On the contrary, multiculturalism insists that members of the different groups should appreciate and respect the other cultures in their society. This in itself leads to inevitable developments in the constituent cultures, especially those that developed in relative isolation.

Furthermore, multiculturalism calls on all the constituent communities in a society to tolerate each other. Some of these communities have cultures that are themselves intolerant. Such cultures will face great pressure for change in a multicultural society.

Finally, multiculturalism insists on a right of exit, the right of individuals to abandon their cultural group. Many cultures do all they can to stop their members from drifting away. On this front, again, they will find themselves under pressure to change in a liberal multicultural society[3].

This tension in multiculturalism between a policy of protecting a plurality of cultures and encouraging change in them may surprise some. But it should not. Liberal multiculturalism does not arise out of conservative nostalgia for pure exotic cultures. It is not a policy of conserving or fossilizing cultures in their pristine state. Nor is it a policy fostering variety for its own sake. It recognizes that change is inevitable in today's world. It recognizes that fossilized cultures cannot serve their members well in contemporary societies with their fast rate of social and economic change. Liberal multiculturalism stems from a concern for the well-being of the members of society. That well-being presupposes respect for one's cultural group and its prosperity. But none of this is opposed to change.

Change is resisted most when it comes as a result of the hostility of the dominant culture. It is also resisted when it arouses fear that one's culture will disappear altogether – diluted and then assimilated by others. In a country where multiculturalism is practiced by the government and accepted by the population the first fear should not arise. The second is less easily laid to rest. Nor is liberal multiculturalism opposed in principle to the assimilation of one cultural group by others. In some countries some of the constituent cultures may lose their vitality and be gradually absorbed. So long as the process is not coerced, does not arise out of lack of respect for people and their communities, and is sufficiently gradual, there is nothing wrong in it. The dying of old cultures is as much part of normal life as the birth of new ones. But the process is much slower and rarer than those who trumpet their fears of the death of their cultures suggest. What they commonly intend is resistance to change, masquerading, innocently or otherwise, as a fight for survival.

[3] It is important to recall that this discussion is confined to multicultural societies where the different communities are not geographically segregated.

In these last remarks, I display again the non-utopian character of the liberal multiculturalism that I advocate. It rejects any ideal that commits us to arrest the course of time, the pressures for change, at some moment of perfection. Indeed, it refuses to have any truck with notions of perfection. Furthermore, it is non-utopian in seeing, conflict between and within cultures as endemic.

4. Why respect Cultures?

The earlier discussion has already brought into the open the most fundamental dialectical element in liberal multiculturalism. While it respects a variety of cultures it refuses to take them at their own estimation. It has its own reasons for respecting cultures, reasons like those expressed in the first part of this essay. These are likely to vary from the reasons provided in most cultures for their value. For example, religious cultures will justify themselves in theological terms. The justification of those very same cultures in the eyes of liberal multiculturalism is humanistic, not theological. In particular, multiculturalism urges respect for cultures that are not themselves liberal cultures – very few are. But it does so while imposing liberal protections for individual freedom on those cultures. This in itself brings it into conflict with the cultures it urges governments to respect. The conflict is inevitable because liberal multiculturalism recognizes and respects those cultures only to the extent that they serve true values. Since its respect of cultures is conditional and granted from a point of view outside many of them, it finds itself in uneasy alliance with supporters of those cultures, sometimes joining them in a common front while at other times turning against them to impose ideals of toleration and mutual respect or to protect the members of those very cultures against oppression by their own group.

5. Objections to Multiculturalism

It is time to turn to the objections to multiculturalism. The one I can do least justice to is that which says: «Some cultures are inferior to others. By encouraging their prosperity, one is acting against the interests of their members. To serve their interests best one should discourage those cultures and encourage rapid assimilation of their members into our superior culture». I believe that very often judgments about the inferiority of other cultures are based on bigotry and ignorance, and that in truth many cultures cannot be compared in those terms. Each of them is valuable. Each of them can be improved

in a way consistent with its own spirit and out of its own resources. But none of them can be judged superior to the others. However, these views can only be justified by plunging into a discussion of the foundations of ethics, which we are mercifully absolved from here. Instead I will address three subsidiary points.

First, some people fear, consciously or unconsciously, that if our culture is not superior to others, we are not entitled to love it as much as we do. If it is not the best, they feel, then it is irrational to be so dedicated to its preservation and cultivation. Moreover, if it is not the best then our ignorance of other cultures is inexcusable. If they are all good and none is superior, we should be equally knowledgeable and interested in all of them.

It is not my wish to discourage people from taking an interest in other cultures, and one should certainly be acquainted with the cultures that inhabit one's country – this is so whether or not they are the equal of one's own. That is one of the duties of citizenship and has nothing to do with the merits of any culture. Putting these considerations aside for the moment, let it be said 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.

Compare one's attitude to one's culture with one's love of one's children. We rightly ridicule parents who feel that their devotion to their children requires holding them to be little geniuses, much better than other children. One loves one's children because they are one's children[4]. The same is true with all personal attachments. The people one loves need not be better than others to make one's love rational. So long as one loves them for the right reasons, and admires in them their virtues rather than their vices, one's love and friendship are sound.

Nor need one feel obliged to become acquainted with all valuable cultures. To do so is the desire of some people, and it is a worthy desire. But it is not one that all people must share. There is no reason to know about or share in everything that is valuable. This too is an aspect of value pluralism. There are many valuable things in the world, and we have no reason to, nor any real possibility of, pursuing all of them.

Second, I would not wish to deny that some cultures or aspects of some cultures are unacceptable and should not benefit from the posi-

[4] And I do not mean genetically one's own. I mean that they are children one brought up and is attached to.

tive attitude that multiculturalism stands for. Some cultures, for example, repress groups of their own members or of outsiders. Slave cultures, racially discriminatory cultures, and homophobic cultures, are obvious examples. These can be supported only to the degree that it is possible to neutralize their oppressive aspects, or compensate for them (for example by providing a convenient exit to members of the group discriminated against).

The test of oppression should be carefully considered. One needs to distinguish between it and the occasional failure of socialization that leaves an individual member of a cultural group alienated from the culture and unable to find fulfillment within it. Occasional failures of socialization are endemic to all cultures. Oppression differs from them in being the result of a structural feature of a culture that systematically prevents people from giving expression to an important aspect of their nature. Not all people will be affected, many will not belong to the oppressed group, where the oppression is based on racial, religious, or some such grounds. Others will not have a great need to express the repressed aspect of their personality, or they will find ways of making do with alternatives. In all sexually oppressive societies many people learn to do without much sex. In societies that repress free inquiry or creativity, many find that their need to engage in these is limited. Adjustability is never complete, and repression invariably leads to much suffering. Even those who adjust suffer. Their lives and personalities become stunted and do not reach full expression. When this is a result of a systematic feature of their culture, the fault is with the culture. In serious cases; it may justify suppressing oppressive cultures. In others, it will call for reform and for mitigating actions in the larger, multicultural society.

Third, even when cultures are at fault, we have reason for supportive toleration. People bred and socialized within such cultures often know no better, and have no choice. Moreover, by the time they are grown up their ability to transplant themselves and become a part of another culture is limited. The limits differ from case to case and are a matter of degree. It is easier to acquire a home in a new cultural community when it does not differ too much from one's own and when one has self-generated motives to do so. It is more difficult when the distance between the cultures is great and the reason for the transition is externally imposed. Given that even oppressive cultures can give people quite a lot, it follows that one should be particularly wary of organized campaigns of assimilation and discrimination against "inferior" and oppressive cultures. They provide many of their members with all that they can have.

In saying this I am not retreating from my earlier view that oppression should not be tolerated. I am merely urging restraint and consideration in thinking of the means by which it is to be countered.

Oppression of members of the cultural group was the second objection to multiculturalism introduced at the outset. We have already considered it, and conceded its force. It is worth adding here that existence in a multicultural society often makes cultural groups more repressive than they would be were they to exist in relative isolation. The insecurity of existence, especially where there is real or perceived discrimination, tends to encourage conservative elements in cultural groups. It also tends to increase pressure on members of the group to turn inward and reduce their contact with the external world – as the only guarantee against defection from the group. Such conservative and repressive pressures can lead to bitter intergenerational conflicts.

Furthermore, the significance of various social practices may change in the new context of a multicultural society. The status of women is a case in point. Probably all cultures known to us, even those that did not repress women, distinguished between men and women – in that a large array of social relationships, occupations, leisure activities, and educational and cultural opportunities, were gender specific. If such separation does not carry with it the implication of an inferior status, and if the opportunities available to both men and women are adequate for their full development and self-expression, there is nothing wrong with such gender-sensitive cultures – so long as they succeed in socializing the young to a willing acceptance of their ways. But once such a cultural group is transplanted to a different environment in which the dominant cultures accept gender determination of opportunities only in exceptional cases, the transplanted group is transformed into an oppressive one. In the new environment it is bound to fail in socializing its young to accept its ways and reject the ideas prevalent in the general culture. In contemporary liberal societies, the prevailing notions of gender nondiscrimination and the debate about feminism are bound to filter across cultural barriers. They will affect the self-understanding of the young (and not only the young). They will inform their perceptions of their own native cultural practices. When this happens the meaning of the gender-based practices changes. It is understood by many of its own members as consigning women to an inferior status. Protestations that that is a perversion of the true meaning of those practices are to no avail. The true meaning of social practices is their social meaning.

A positive attitude to multiculturalism can be thought to lend support to the conservative strands in various communities. But to my mind this is a mistake. Cultures are bound to undergo changes within a multicultural society. The fact that members of cultural groups intermix to a considerable degree is bound to have its impact on the different groups in the society. The preservation of their culture is justified only in terms of its contribution to well-being. This requires an adjustment of each, of the groups to the conditions of a relatively harmonious coexistence within one political society.

Peaceful coexistence in one political society requires men and women to acquaint themselves with the customs of all the people and ethnic groups in their country. Hence they will have opportunities, sometimes temptations, to drift out of their native cultural group into another. Attempts to prevent people from seizing these opportunities undermine the possibility of mutual peaceful existence.

Moreover, the opportunity to exit from a group is a vital protection for those members of it who are oppressed by its culture. The opportunity of exit is a counter to the worry that multiculturalism encourages oppressive cultures to perpetuate their ways. I have already indicated that political societies are entitled, indeed required to discourage oppressive practices in their constituent cultural groups. The groups should be encouraged to change such practices. But this is a very slow process. Opportunities of exit should be encouraged as a safeguard, however imperfect, for members who cannot develop and find adequate avenues for self-expression within their native culture.

6. *Solidarity*

The final objection to multiculturalism is that it undermines social solidarity, which is invariably built on the possession of a common culture. Without a deep feeling of solidarity, a political society will disintegrate into quarreling factions. Solidarity is required if people are to feel concerned about each other's fortunes, and to be willing to make sacrifices for other people. Without such willingness the possibility of a peaceful political society disappears.

There is a lot of truth in this argument. Civic solidarity is essential to the existence of a well-ordered political society. But the argument is too quick in asserting that a common culture is essential to solidarity, and that multiculturalism is inconsistent with the existence of a common culture.

Let me take the last point first. The truth is that multiculturalism, while endorsing the perpetuation of several cultural groups in a sin-

gle political society, also requires the existence of a common culture. First, coexistence calls for the cultivation of mutual toleration and respect. This affects the education of the young in all the constituent groups in the society. All of them will enjoy education in the cultural traditions of their own communities, but all of them will also be educated to understand and respect the traditions of the other groups in the society. This will apply to the majority group, where such a group exists, as well. Its young will learn the minority traditions of their society. Cultivation of mutual respect and tolerance, knowledge of the history and traditions of one's country with all its communities, will provide one element of a common culture.

A second element will result from the fact that members of all communities will interact in the same economic environment. They will share in tapping the same job market, the same market for services and for goods. This means that they will have to possess the same mathematical, literary, and other skills required for effective participation in the economy.

Finally, members of all cultural groups will belong to the same political society. They will enjoy roughly equal access to the sources of political power and to decision-making positions. They will have to acquire a common political language and conventions of conduct to be able to participate effectively in the competition for resources and the protection of group as well as individual interests in a shared political arena.

The emergence of such a common culture is still an aspiration, for while elements of it are already evident in some multicultural societies, none has reached the level of development of a common culture, that is evident in some culturally homogeneous societies. Whether the sort of common culture I have outlined is capable of forming a basis for social solidarity sufficient to secure the cohesion and stability of modern political, societies remains a moot point. But I think that it may serve this purpose successfully, and should be given a chance to do so.

But, while the liberal common culture of pluralistic societies remains to be developed, a swift social change toward multiculturalism may severely test the existing bonds of solidarity in a society and threaten disintegration or a backlash of rabid nationalism: this, while it does not pose an objection of principle to liberal multiculturalism, requires great caution in the method and speed with which multicultural policies are implemented.

Multiculturalism, in the sense of the existence within the same political society of a number of sizable cultural groups wishing and

able to maintain their distinct identity, is with us to stay. It is likely to grow in size and importance. Liberal multiculturalism, as I call it, affirms that in the circumstances of contemporary industrial or postindustrial societies, a political attitude of fostering and encouraging the prosperity, cultural and material, of cultural groups within a society, and respecting their identity is justified by considerations of freedom and human dignity. These considerations call on governments to take action that goes beyond that required by policies of toleration and nondiscrimination. While incorporating policies of nondiscrimination, liberal multiculturalism transcends the individualistic approach and recognizes the importance of unimpeded membership in a respected and flourishing cultural group for individual well-being.

This doctrine has far-reaching ramifications. It calls on us to reconceive society, changing its self-image. We should learn to think of our societies as consisting not of a majority and minorities, but of a plurality of cultural groups. Naturally, such developments take a long period to come to fruition, and they cannot be secured through government action alone, as they require a widespread change in attitude. The current attitude of the population at large, and the speed with which it accepts the precepts of multiculturalism, set limits on the practicability and good sense of proceeding with various concrete policies to advance and implement liberal multiculturalism. But we must think of the long term to set short-term policies within a sensible context. The size of cultural groups and their viability also affect the way various concrete measures should be pursued. There is no point in trying to prop up by public action cultures that have become moribund and whose communities – usually their young members – drift away from them. Of course multiculturalism changes the prospects of survival for cultures it supports. That is its aim. But it recognizes that public policies can only serve to facilitate developments desired by the population, not to force cultural activities down the throats of an indifferent population.

The more concrete policies, which become appropriate gradually as developments justify them, include measures like the following:

1) The young of all cultural groups should be educated, if their parents so desire, in the culture of their own groups. But all of them should also be educated to be familiar with and cultivate an attitude of respect for the history and traditions of all the cultures in the country.
2) The customs and practices of the different groups should, within the limits of toleration we have explored earlier, be recognized in

law and by all public bodies in society, as well as by private companies and organizations that serve the public. At the moment, petty intolerance is rife in many countries. In Britain people still have to fight to be allowed to wear traditional dress to school or to work, to give one example.

3) It is crucial to break the link between poverty, under-education, and ethnicity. So long as certain ethnic groups are so overwhelmingly over-represented among poor, ill-educated, unskilled, and semiskilled workers, the possibilities of cultivating respect for their cultural identity, even the possibilities of self-respect, are greatly undermined.
4) There should be generous public support for autonomous cultural institutions, such as communal charities, voluntary organizations, libraries, museums, and artistic groups. In the competition for public resources the size of the groups concerned is an important factor. It works in two ways. By and large, it favors the larger groups with a more committed membership. But it also calls for disproportionate support for small groups that are strong enough to pass the viability test. Given that the overheads are significant, the per capita cost of support for small groups is greater than for large ones.
5) Public space (as well as air space on television) should accommodate all the cultural groups. Where they differ in their aesthetic sense, in their preferences for colors, patterns, smells, music, noise and speed, some public spaces may be divided between them, as often happens without direction in ethnic neighborhoods, while preserving others as common to all.

Of course, all such measures are designed to lead to relatively harmonious coexistence of non-oppressive and tolerant communities. They, therefore, have their limits. But it is important not to use false standards as tests of the limits of toleration. The fact that the Turkish government, say, does not tolerate certain practices of the Kurds in Turkey, is no reason why Kurds from Turkey should not be allowed to resume the practices when they settle in Europe. Similarly, the fact that tolerating certain immigrant practices will lead to changes in the character of some neighborhoods or public spaces in one's country is no reason for suppressing them. Toleration is limited only in denying communities the right to repress their own members, in discouraging intolerant attitudes to outsiders, in insisting on making exit from the community a viable option for its members. Beyond that, liberal multiculturalism will also require all groups to allow their members

access to adequate opportunities for self-expression and full participation in the economic life and the political culture of the community.

The combined effect of such policies is that liberal multiculturalism leads not to the abandonment of a common culture, but to the emergence of a new common culture that is respectful toward all the groups of the country, and hospitable to their prosperity.