Multiculturalism: A Liberal Perspective

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I. LIBERALISM AND MULTICULTURALISM

I was grateful for being invited to participate in this conference, and frightened by my acceptance of the invitation. Grateful for the honour - and for the opportunity to explore further the implications of the liberal political theory I have faith in for the way contemporary democracies should treat multiculturalism. Frightened at my own presumption in addressing my thoughts to the condition of a country of whose problems I know little, and to the situation under Dutch law of which I know nothing. I was emboldened by my hosts, who reassured me that by the time my turn comes the conference will be suffused with expert knowledge of Dutch law and the most comprehensive understanding of the social condition of the Netherlands. My job is that of the generalist who can talk about everything without knowing anything. For he is a philosopher dealing with immortal ideas.

I should perhaps explain that I do not really believe that political philosophy provides 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. But we cannot set the precise boundaries for their application. There are two principled reasons for this limitation.

First, it is in principle impossible to articulate comprehensively all the relevant moral considerations which we are aware of, and impossible to state in general how much they weigh against each other in situations of conflict. Saying this is to emphasize that moral knowledge is practical in a special sense, i.e. that 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. My point is not that there is ineffable moral knowledge. Everything we know can be articulated, can be expressed in words. But it cannot be exhaustively expressed in general abstract formulae. The situation is 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.

This essay is an extended version of the talk I gave at the conference on Multiculturalism and the Law, organized by Professor Max Brod in Leiden in Oct. 1992. It retains the conversational style of the original talk. Given the aim to survey a wide range of the problems multiculturalism raises for contemporary liberalism, I indulged in expressing views only sketchily supported by arguments. Some of the missing arguments can be found in *The Morality of Freedom*, and in chs. 5 and 6 above. I am grateful to Dr P. A. Bulloch for trenchant and helpful objections to an earlier version.
at that point. Not everything we know can be exhaustively stated 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 and lacks universal validity is that there are principled limitations to our ability to conceive how society will develop. The problem is not merely due to the complexity of the social conditions which may prevail in the future, a complexity which defeats our ability to apply our principles to those conditions. The problem extends further. Social situations can change in such a way that the very concepts we employ to understand and analyse them become inapplicable, thus making the principles both of (so-called descriptive) social science and of (so-called) evaluative political morality inapplicable.

I start my reflections with these remarks on the contextuality of political theory for two reasons. First, my reasons for belief in contextuality presuppose 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 that of identity. Seventeenth- and eighteenth-century liberalism was, by and large, right for its time and place. Those of us who adhere today to liberal political theories should do so not by adhering to the theories of Locke or Kant but by embracing contemporary theories, valid for our conditions, which descend in spirit from those of their classical forefathers. This is important for a reflection on the importance of community for individual well-being.

The migration of labour familiar since the rise of capitalism, and accelerated to undreamt-of proportions by the combined effect of contemporary mass media and means of communications and of 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 social benefits financed by strangers whom they never meet, and administered by faceless, rule-applying officials. Ours is a culture in which we feel more comfortable on a beach, in a park, a restaurant, or a concert-hall bustling with strangers, observing them as they observe us. We are more likely to feel uncomfortable and restless on a lonely beach, or in an empty restaurant. We feel at ease in an apartment block served by lifts which keep its residents unseen by each other, and we feel stifled and oppressed in a closely knit local community where everyone knows us, and our history, and where every deviation from our daily routine is noted.
behind neighbouring curtains and every one of our visitors is closely observed by our neighbours. This way we can choose our friends, and do not have to befriend people just because they are neighbours, nor be subject to their approval and disapproval of our actions and friends.

The advantages of the culture of urban anonymity are many. But it is inadequate to cope with the multiculturalism which started emerging 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, and wishing to find their home in a new society. It is tempting to exaggerate and say that it was made for such people, be they internal or external migrants. But this culture cannot adequately cope with the conditions of today. The threatening results of this failure are the development of a subculture of anomie, of accelerating alienation from society and its institutions, and the emergence of a growing underclass.

Hence the development of a third liberal response to multiculturalism. I call it a third approach for two others can be seen as part supplements, part rivals to it. First was the attitude and policy which I will dub 'toleration'. 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, and with the ability of members of the majority to enjoy the life-styles of their culture. To a considerable degree this limitation meant restriction of the use of public spaces and public media by the minority. It also usually means that all activities of a minority are to be financed out of the resources of that 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 no one may be coerced except in order to restrain him from causing harm to others or to punish him for causing harm to others. By this principle, conduct of members of minority cultural groups which does not harm others may not be criminalized. Arguments of the second type, commonly relied upon to justify toleration, 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 and hostility of minorities which are not allowed to continue with their religious and cultural activities and practices.

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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*. Here I am using the term to capture the spirit of one fairly familiar attitude to minorities.
Toleration was eventually supplemented, perhaps even supplanted, by a second liberal policy towards 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 preference. Non-discrimination rights are a natural extension of the classical liberal conception of constitutional civil and political rights. They also fit that strand of liberalism made popular by the writings of Rawls, according to which the principles on which the constitution is based and which are used to justify political action should make no reference to any specific conception of the good life. Non-discrimination rights go well beyond toleration. They have far-reaching consequences which intrude on and 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 neighbourhoods, etc. Usually non-discrimination rights are interpreted to allow each community control over certain exclusive institutions. They also normally tolerate a measure of discrimination in one's private dealings. But under a regime of scrupulous non-discrimination a country's public services, its education, 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, for example, to a country which receives 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 which have lost their ability to perpetuate themselves. This could happen, for instance, where the ossification of their culture and the allure of the surrounding cultures means that the vast majority of their young people wish to assimilate in the majority culture and rebel against their parents' culture.

In what follows I will continue to use 'multiculturalism' ambiguously. On the one hand it is a predicate which indicates a society in which the conditions set out in the previous paragraph obtain. On the other hand it is a policy of saying yes to this situation. For the discussion that follows it is important to distinguish two types of multicultural society. In one the different communities live in the main in separate geographical regions (e.g. the Inuits in Canada and the Scots in Britain). The other type obtains where, even though the communities may be disproportionately concentrated in

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2 Arguably, all that toleration guarantees is also protected by non-discrimination rights.
different residential neighbourhoods, there is in the main no geographical separateness. In that case, 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 which characterizes societies whose multiculturalism is of relatively recent vintage, resulting from the ever-growing migrations of the modern era. The discussion of this essay should be understood to be focused on the second type, that of multiculturalism without territorial separation. The policy of multiculturalism differs from that which relies exclusively on non-discrimination rights in rejecting the individualistic bias of the latter. While endorsing non-discrimination 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. Multiculturalism as an evaluative approach is anchored in a belief in the interdependence of individual well-being and the prosperity of the cultural group to which those individuals belong. Second, multiculturalism arises out of a belief in value pluralism, and in particular in the validity of the diverse values embodied in the practices which constitute the diverse and in many ways incompatible values 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 includes 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. While 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 tend to be limited and less developed. These perceptions feed the fear that flirting with multiculturalism leads liberals to contradict their own
fundamental values. Why should liberals give succour to cultures based on the repudiation of liberal values?

Finally, there is the fear that a common culture is the cement of society. Without it society will fall apart. Living in one political society entails a willingness to suffer for the sake of other members of society. The resentment of West Germans, let alone other Europeans, at the prospect of having to make sacrifices to solve the social and economic problems of the eastern part of Germany illustrates that the willingness to make sacrifices is an attitude of mind which is hard to gain. I will first state briefly the liberal case for multiculturalism, and then deal with the 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 supermarket liberalism. Before I venture a brief explanation, I would like to clarify the spirit permeating my observations. It is not one of utopian hope. It is not one of a vision of the great future to which liberalism holds the key, 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.

II. THE CASE FOR MULTICULTURALISM

When I was invited to the conference my first thought was admiration for the organizers, who are already thinking of the problems of a post-Maastricht Europe. That will, of course, be a multicultural Europe in which the Netherlands will be one minority community striving to protect its standing.

I soon realized that I mistook the problem they had in mind. But it occurred to me that, when one thinks in the Netherlands or in Britain of the right way to deal with cultural groups within our countries, one should always imagine what one would want to happen had the question affected not the Turks, let us say in the Netherlands, or the Bangladeshis in Britain, but the Dutch or the British in Europe. If we always start by applying this procedure and transferring the answer to the case of cultural communities within our countries, subject to the modifications which are really required by the differing circumstances, then we will not go far wrong.

This is in brief my view about multiculturalism. I doubt that what follows improves it. But at least it makes it more explicit. So let me carry on. Liberalism is more than just a political morality. It is a political morality which arises out of a view of the good of people, a view which emphasizes the value of freedom to individual well-being. Liberalism upholds the value for people of being in charge of their life, charting its course by their own successive choices.
been dedicated to exploring the ways in which restrictions on individual choices, be they legal or social, can be removed, and obstacles to choice - due to poverty, lack of education, or other limitations on access to goods - overcome. An aspect of freedom which has fallen into disrepute in some circles used to be known as the difference between freedom and licence. Freedom, said Spinoza, Kant, and others, is conduct in accord with rational laws. Licence is arbitrary choice, in disregard of reason. There is no denying that the slogan that freedom is not licence 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 are understood, the justification of multiculturalism becomes obvious.

To a considerable degree the claim that freedom is action in accordance with reason is no more than 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, and we can exercise our freedom by choosing them only if we comply with their inner reason. A simple illustration will make the point. One cannot play chess by doing what one wants, say, 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 his freedom to a child. But that is the tempting illusion of licence. 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, etc. Relative to the options which make up the core of our lives they are simple, relatively one-dimensional, and tend to be governed by relatively explicit rules. The options which make 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 which depend on rules which 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 - the philosophically bemused parent will add - this is 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 to govern all aspects of one's conduct. The density of our activities, their multiplicity of dimensions and aspects 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 behaviour has to be guided, to be directed and channelled into a coherent meaningful whole. Here then is the argument. The core options which give meaning to our lives - the different occupations we can pursue, the friendships and relationships we can have, the loyalties and commitments which 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 which constitute options as if they come one by one. The reality is, and practically speaking has to be, different. Social practices are interlaced with each other. Those constituting language are also elements of all others; the practices of parenting and other social relationships intersect. Not only do many people naturally move 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, or the caring professions, are each marked by common and overlapping practices. Such conglomerations of interlocking practices which constitute the range of life options open to one who is socialized in them is what cultures are. Small wonder, therefore, that membership in cultural groups is of vital importance to individuals.

Only through being socialized in a culture can one tap the options which 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 their cultural group. Its prosperity contributes to the richness and variety of the opportunities the culture provides access to. This is the first of three ways in which full membership in a cultural group and its prosperity affect one's own prospects in life.
The second is the fact that sameness of culture facilitates social relations, and is a condition of rich and comprehensive personal relationships. 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 which 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 remain close to them.

The third way in which being a member of a prosperous cultural community affects individual well-being takes us to a further dimension not yet considered. For most people, membership in their cultural group is a major determinant of their sense of who they are; it provides a strong focus of identification; it contributes to what we have come to call their sense of their own identity. This is not really surprising: given that one's culture sets the horizon of one's opportunities, it is natural to think of it as constituting one's identity. 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 not just what he is but how he came to be what he is, i.e. to understand what he might have been and why he is some of those things and not others. In this way one's culture constitutes (contributes to) one's identity. Therefore slighting one's culture, persecuting it, holding it up for ridicule, slighting its value, etc., affect members of that group. Such conducts hurts them and offends their dignity. This is particularly offensive if it has the imprimatur of one's state or of the majority of official culture of one's country.

So this is the case for multiculturalism. It is a case which 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 vital importance to the prosperity of individual human beings. This case is a liberal case, for it emphasizes the role of cultures as a precondition for, and a factor which gives shape and content to, individual freedom. Given that dependence of individual freedom and well-being on unimpeded membership in a respected and prosperous cultural group, there is little wonder that

3 Please do not understand this point as suggesting that people belonging to two nations, or two social classes, say a Frenchman and 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 neighbouring groups.
multiculturalism emerges as a central element in any decent liberal political programme for societies inhabited by a number of viable cultural groups.4

III. THE DIALECTICS OF PLURALISM

The Unstable Tensions of Competitive 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. When relations between two communities are at their most amicable they are accompanied by disapproval of the other culture, be it for its decadence, its vulgarity, lack of sense of humour, its treatment of women, or something else. It would be comforting to think that such enmity is sometimes justified, and that in the other cases it is due to ignorance and bigotry which 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. Belief in value pluralism is the view that many different activities and forms of life which are incompatible 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, both valuable activities, for 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 and so forth.

The plurality and mutual exclusivity of valuable activities and forms or styles of life is a commonplace. It becomes philosophically significant the moment one rejects a still pervasive belief in the reducibility of all values to one value which serves as a common denominator to the multiplicity of valuable ways of life. In our day and age, with its sometimes creeping, sometimes explicit, subjectivism, the reduction is most commonly to the value of feeling happy, or having one's desires satisfied. Value pluralism is the doctrine which 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 a family life for a career as a sailor one is getting, or hoping to get,
the same thing one is giving up, be it happiness, pleasure, desire-satisfaction, 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 family life 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 the plurality of valuable ways of life asserted by pluralism need not manifest itself in the same society. We may value the different cultures of Classical Greece without its opportunities and ways of life being options for us. But typically in our day and age pluralism exists within every society, indeed within every culture. That generates conflict between competing and incompatible activities and ways of life. When valuable alternatives we do not pursue 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 to succeed in my chosen course. Their life requires impetuosity, swift responses, and decisive action. People whose life requires these excellences 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 at the expense of those which are incompatible with them. 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 a variety of dismissive attitudes to the virtues of the competing ways of life. People who chose my way of life are in a similar position, only with contrary commitments.

Conflict is endemic. Of course, pluralists can step back from their personal commitments and appreciate in the abstract the value of other ways of life and their attendant virtues. But this acknowledgement coexists with, and cannot replace, the feelings of rejection and dismissiveness towards what one knows is in itself valuable. Tension is an inevitable concomitant of accepting the truth of value pluralism. And it is a tension without stability, without a definite resting-point of reconciliation of the two perspectives, the one recognizing the validity of competing values and the one hostile to them. There is no point of equilibrium, no single balance which is correct and could
prevail to bring the two perspectives together. One is forever moving from one to the other from
time to time.

**The Transforming Effect of Multiculturalism**

The inescapable tension between acceptance and rivalry between competing valuable ways of life,
which forever threatens to destabilize, is common to all forms of value pluralism, where plural
incompatible options coexist in the same society. It 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 dialectics of pluralism I want to focus on is special to
multiculturalism.

Multiculturalism is often a result of a transition from life in a relatively homogeneous society
to life in a multicultural one. It is a result of conquest of a territory and subjugating 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
neighbouring, but culturally distinct, countries, as in the case of Czechoslovakia, or Great Britain.
In all these cases the constituent cultures face great pressures to change in their new multicultural
societies as a result of their interaction with the other groups in the society. Naturally they wish to
resist the pressure for change. The desire to resist change is particularly felt by small communities
when the change is perceived to be the impact of coexistence with much larger groups whose
cultures dominate the atmosphere in 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 while this is so, and while it is of the essence of multiculturalism that different
communities should enjoy their fair share of opportunities and resources to maintain their cultures
and develop them in their own way, multiculturalism as I see it is not inherently opposed to change,
not even to change which is induced by coexistence with other cultural groups. On the contrary, as
we will see in what follows, multiculturalism insists that members of the different groups in a
society should be aware of the different cultures in their society, and learn to appreciate their
strengths and respect them. This in itself leads to inevitable developments in the constituent
cultures, especially those which have developed in relative isolation and ignorance of other cultures.

Furthermore, multiculturalism calls on all the constituent communities in a society to tolerate
each other. Some of these communities have a culture which is itself intolerant, or whose toleration
of others is inadequate. Such cultures will face a great pressure for change in a multicultural society. Finally, as we will see, multiculturalism insists on a right of exit, that is, the right of each individual to abandon his cultural group. Many cultures do all they can to stop their members from drifting away, or leaving their communities. On this front again they will find themselves under pressure to change in a liberal multicultural society.\(^5\) This tension in multiculturalism, between a policy of protecting a plurality of cultures and recognizing and sometimes encouraging change in them, may surprise some. But it should not. Liberal multiculturalism does not arise out of conservative nostalgia for some pure exotic cultures. It is not a policy of conserving, fossilizing some 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 generally 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, as we saw, respect for one's cultural group and its prosperity. But none of this is opposed to change.

Change is resisted most when it is seen as a result of hostility of the majority, or of the dominant culture, to minority cultures. It is also resisted when it arouses fear that one's culture will disappear altogether by being diluted and then assimilated by others. It is to be hoped that, in a country where multiculturalism is practised by the government and accepted by the population, the first fear will be generally felt to be unfounded. The second is less easily laid to rest. Furthermore, it has to be admitted that liberal multiculturalism is not 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 by others. So long as the process is not coerced, does not arise out of lack of respect for people and their communities, and is gradual, there is nothing wrong in it. The dying of 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 proclaim. What they most commonly have in mind is resistance to change, masquerading, innocently or otherwise, as a fight for survival.

In these remarks I display again the non-utopian character of the liberal multiculturalism which I advocate. It is non-utopian in rejecting any ideal which wishes to arrest the course of time, the pressures for change, some moment of perfection. Indeed, it refuses to have any truck with notions of perfection. Furthermore, it is non-utopian in seeing as endemic the continuation of

\(^5\) At this point it is particularly important to recall that this discussion is confined to multicultural societies where the different communities are not geographically segregated.
conflict, between cultures and, within every one of them, between those favouring change and those resisting it.

Do Not Take Cultures at Their Own Estimation

Finally, 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 which are not themselves liberal cultures - very few are. As we shall see, it does so while imposing liberal protection of 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 because and 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, there is little surprise that it finds itself in uneasy alliance with supporters of those cultures, sometimes joining them in a common front while at others 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.6

IV. OBJECTIONS TO MULTICULTURALISM

Protecting Inferior Cultures?

It is time to return to the objections to multiculturalism mentioned at the outset. 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 in 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 simply cannot be compared in those terms.

6 The Rushdie affair in Britain exemplified the dialectics of liberal toleration in its most acute form. See on this issue ch. 6 above.
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. But these views can only be justified by plunging into a discussion of the foundations of ethics, which we are mercifully absolved from on this occasion. 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. We should, if they are all good and none is superior, 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, as will be discussed below, one should be acquainted with the cultures which inhabit one's country - and this is so whether or not they are the equal of one's own. That requirement is a result of the duties of citizenship, and has nothing to do with the merits of any culture. Putting these considerations on one side 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. The same is true with all personal attachments. The people one loves need not be, nor need they be thought to 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 learn and 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 which all people must share. There is no reason to know of or share in everything that is valuable. This too is an aspect of value pluralism. According to it there is plenty valuable in the world and we have no reason to pursue, nor any real possibility of pursuing, all of it. Second, I would not wish to deny that some cultures, or aspects of some cultures, are unacceptable, and should not benefit from the positive attitude to a plurality of cultures which multiculturalism stands for. There are various dimensions by which cultures or aspects of them can be compared and judged. I will mention only one whose importance is obvious. Some cultures repress groups of either their own members or of outsiders. Slave cultures, racially discriminatory cultures, and homophobic cultures are obvious examples. Such

7 And I do not mean genetically one's own. I mean that they are children one has brought up and is attached to.
cultures may be supported only to the degree that it is possible to neutralize their oppressive aspects, or compensate for them (for example, by providing convenient exit from the oppressive community to members of the discriminated-against group).

The test of oppression should be carefully considered. One needs to distinguish between it and occasional failure of socialization leaving an individual member of a cultural group alienated from his culture, and unable to find fulfillment within it. Occasional failures of socialization are endemic to all cultures. Oppression differs from them in being a result of a structural feature of that culture which systematically frustrates the ability of people, or groups of people, to fulfill or give expression to an important aspect of their nature within that society. Not all people will be affected by oppressive aspects of society. Many will not belong to the oppressed group, where the oppression is based on racial, religious, or some such grounds. Others will not have such great need to express the repressed aspect of their personality, or they will find ways of making do with substitutes or alternatives. In all sexually oppressive societies, such as homophobic ones, many people learn to do without much sex. In societies which repress the spirit of free inquiry or of imaginative creativity, many find that their need to engage in them is limited and can be suppressed without too much difficulty. Adjustability is never complete, and repression invariably leads to much suffering. But 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 the oppressive cultures. In others it will call for reform, and for mitigating actions in the multicultural society of which they are a part.

Third, and finally, even when cultures are at fault, and certainly when they are inferior without being oppressive, we have reason for supportive toleration. People bred and socialized within such cultures often knew no better, and had 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 original cultural group, and when one has self-generated motives to do so. It is more difficult when the distance between the cultures is great and when 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 even oppressive cultures. For many of their members they provide them with all that they can have, as it may be too late for them to make a transition.
In saying this I am not going back on 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.

**More on Oppressive and Intolerant Cultures**

Oppression of members of the cultural group was the second objection introduced at the outset. We have already considered it, and conceded its force, because repression and repressive oppression are among the criteria affecting the relative merits of various cultures. 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 in multicultural societies, especially where there is real or perceived discrimination against the group, tends to encourage conservative elements in cultural groups, resisting all change in their culture which is equated with its dilution to the point of extinction. They also tend to increase pressure on members of the group to turn inward and reduce their contact with the external world, as an inward outlook is perceived 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 by being brought into the new context of a multicultural society. The status of women is a case in point. Set aside the various cultures which repressed women. Probably all cultures known to us, even those which did not repress women, distinguished between men and women in that a large array of social relationships, occupations, leisure activities, educational and cultural opportunities, and the like were gender-specific. Provided such separation does not carry with it the implication of an inferior status, and provided the opportunities available to either men or 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 all its young to accept its ways and reject the ideas prevalent in the general culture. In contemporary broadly liberal societies, the prevailing notions of gender non-discrimination and the debate about feminism is bound to filter across the cultural barriers. It will affect the self-understanding of the young, and not only the young. It will inform their perceptions of their own native cultural practices. When this happens, the meaning of the gender-based practices of the culture changes. It is understood by many of its own members as consigning women to an
inferior status. The protestations that that is a perversion of the meaning of those practices are to no avail. The true meaning of social practices is their social meaning. Thus existence of a cultural group in a new multicultural environment can lead to a change in the meaning of some of its practices and make them oppressive.

A positive attitude to multiculturalism can be thought to be committed to lending support to the conservative strands in various communities, at least when they become the dominant voice of the community. But to my mind this is a mistake. As was remarked above, cultures are bound to undergo changes as a result of existing 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 the well-being of people. This requires an adjustment of each of the cultural groups to the conditions of a relatively harmonious coexistence within one political society. As will be emphasized below, peaceful coexistence and participation in one political society require becoming acquainted with the customs of all the people and ethnic groups in one's country. This creates opportunities, sometimes it creates the temptation, to drift out of one's native cultural group and into another. Attempts to prevent people from having 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 repressed by its culture. Given that most cultures known to us are repressive to a lesser or greater degree, the opportunity of exit is of vital importance as a counter to the worry that multiculturalism encourages repressive cultures to perpetuate their ways. I have already indicated that political societies are entitled, indeed required, to discourage repressive practices in their constituent cultural groups. The groups should be encouraged to change their repressive 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.

**Solidarity**

The final objection to multiculturalism was 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 for people to feel concerned about

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8 Remember again that societies in which cultural groups enjoy considerable geographical and economic separation have been excluded from consideration here.
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 the argument. Civic solidarity is essential to the existence of a well-ordered political society. Where the argument is too quick is 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. The truth is that multiculturalism, while endorsing the perpetuation of several cultural groups in a single political society, also requires the existence of a common culture in which the different coexisting cultures are embedded. This is a direct result of the fact that it speaks for a society in which different cultural groups coexist in relative harmony, sharing in the same political regime. First, coexistence calls for the cultivation of mutual toleration and respect. This affects in a major way first and foremost 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 communities. But all of them will also be educated to understand and respect the traditions of the other groups in the society. This will also apply to the majority group, where such a group exists. Its young will learn the traditions of minority groups in the society. Cultivation of mutual respect and toleration, of 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 tap the same job market, the same market for services and for goods. Some communities may be over-represented in some sectors of the market, as either consumers of goods and services or their producers and providers. But by and large they will inhabit the same economy. 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 all be educated and placed to 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 common conventions of conduct, to be able to compete effectively for resources and to be able to protect their group as well as individual interests in a shared political arena. A common political culture will be the third major component of a common culture that will be generated in liberal multicultural societies.

The emergence of such a common culture is still to an extent 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 sufficient to form a basis for the social solidarity required to
secure the cohesion and stability of modern political societies remains, therefore, a moot point. But I think that it may serve this purpose successfully, and should be given a chance to do so.

It remains the case that, while the liberal common culture of pluralistic societies remains to be developed, a swift social change towards multiculturalism may well 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.

V. FINAL WORDS

Multiculturalism, in the sense of the existence within the same political society of a number of sizeable cultural groups wishing and in principle able to maintain their distinct identity, is with us to stay. In so far as one can discern the trend of historical events, it is likely to grow in size and importance. Liberal multiculturalism, as I called it, as a normative principle affirms that, in the circumstances of contemporary industrialist or post-industrialist 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 which goes beyond that required by policies of toleration and non-discrimination. While incorporating policies of non-discrimination, liberal multiculturalism transcends the individualistic approach which they tend to incorporate, 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 long-term to set short-term policies within a sensible context. The size of cultural groups and their viability is another variable affecting the way various concrete measures should be pursued. Where publicly funded programmes are called for, relative size is inevitably a consideration. So is viability. There is no point in trying to prop up by public action cultures which have lost their vitality, which 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 deliberate public policies can serve a useful purpose only if they find response in the population they are meant to serve. They can serve to facilitate developments desired by the population, but not to force cultural activities down the throats of an indifferent population. The more concrete policies, which become appropriate gradually, as developments justify, 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 groups. But all of them should also be educated to be familiar with the history and traditions of all the cultures in the country, and an attitude of respect for them should be cultivated.

2. The different 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 which serve the public, be it as large employers, providers of services, or otherwise. 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, undereducation, and ethnicity. So long as certain ethnic groups are so overwhelmingly over-represented among the poor, ill-educated, unskilled, and semi-skilled workers, the possibilities of cultivating respect for their cultural identity, even the possibility of members of the group being able to have self-respect and to feel pride in their cultures, are greatly undermined.

4. There should be a generous policy of public support for autonomous cultural institutions, such as communal charities, voluntary organizations, libraries, museums, theatre, dance, musical or other artistic groups. Here (as in education) the policy calls for allocation of public resources. In the competition for them the size of the groups concerned is an important factor. It works in two ways. By and large it favours the larger groups with a more committed membership. But it also calls for disproportionate support for small groups which are strong enough to pass the viability test. Given that the overheads are significant, the per capita cost of support for small viable cultural groups is greater than for large ones. 5. Public space, streets, squares, parks, shopping arcades, etc. (as well as air space on television) should accommodate all the cultural groups. Where they differ in their aesthetic sense, in their preferences for colours, patterns, smells, music, noise, and speed, the solution may involve dividing some public spaces between them, as often happens without direction in ethnic neighbourhoods, 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 does not tolerate certain practices of the Kurds, let us say, in Turkey, is no reason why the Kurds from Turkey should not be allowed to continue with the practice when they settle in Europe. Similarly, the fact that tolerating certain practices of immigrant communities will lead to a change in the character of some neighbourhoods or public spaces in one's country is no reason for suppressing them. The limits of toleration are 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 participation in the economic life of the country, and the cultivation of the attitudes and skills required for effective participation in the political culture of the community.

5. 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 common culture which is respectful towards all the groups of the country, and hospitable to their prosperity.