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Does Liberalism Need Multiculturalism? A Critique of Liberal Multiculturalism

Abstract: In this paper I will argue that liberal multiculturalism is neither a necessary nor a convincing extension of liberalism. In evaluating the two main strands of liberal multiculturalism, I will first analyse the approaches of Charles Taylor and Bhikhu Parekh as the main proponents of the version that focuses on the cultures themselves and raises the issue of the value of cultures in connection with public discourse. I will then turn to Amy Gutmann and Will Kymlicka as liberal multiculturalists who use the liberal norm of individual equality as a starting point. I will show that the arguments adduced in favour of liberal multiculturalism fail, due to the following shortcomings. Taylor's approach is underspecified with respect to the relationship between the process of evaluating cultures and its outcome. Gutmann's theory fails to bridge the gaps between the individual, cultural belonging and positive duties of the state. Parekh's and Kymlicka's theories lead back to liberalism. I conclude that the idea of cultural difference has little of substance to add to the liberal view of social justice.

Introduction.

Cultural practices have been at the centre of intense public debates in many Western countries. Apart from the specific issues at stake, the basic question about what stance Western states should take towards cultural minorities is as yet very contentious. In political theory, however, it is now generally accepted that cultural groups are not only entitled to nondiscrimination, but also to some form of public recognition. From the range of philosophical approaches that constitute the politics of recognition, liberal multiculturalism has become the focus of an emerging consensus (Kymlicka 2001, p. 39). It is widely accepted as one important paradigm for social justice in culturally diverse societies, and modern societies are generally seen as culturally diverse.

In this paper I will argue that the fusion of multiculturalism and liberalism in liberal multiculturalism is considerably more problematic than its proponents are generally prepared to acknowledge, and I will conclude that liberal multiculturalism is neither a necessary nor a convincing extension of liberalism.

In section I, I define the scope of what I consider to be liberal multiculturalism, and distinguish it from both liberalism and other varieties of multiculturalism. I then turn to analysing four prominent theories of liberal multiculturalism. Sections II and III are dedicated to Charles Taylor and Bhikhu Parekh as the main proponents of the version of liberal multiculturalism that focuses on the cultures themselves and raises the issue of the value of cultures in connection with public discourse.

Sections IV and V focus on Amy Gutmann and Will Kymlicka as liberal multiculturalists who take the liberal norm of individual equality as a starting point.

The discussion will show that all four authors fail to argue convincingly in favour of complementing liberalism with multiculturalism, and that their failure is due to one of two shortcomings. Taylor's and Gutmann's arguments are too weak and problem-ridden to be convincing, Parekh’s and Kymlicka’s theories lead back to liberalism.

The process of studying and evaluating cultures that Taylor advocates remains underspecified, especially with respect to the question if and how the result of all processes of studying cultures should be related to and have an impact on actual policies. It will be argued that this is more than just a problem of operationalisation; there is a fundamental tension between recommending an open-ended process of evaluating cultures and being concerned with equality. Parekh tries to circumvent this problem by introducting the notion of a bifocal dialogue. Yet when discussing specific examples, Parekh cannot and does not wish to avoid holding on to universal standards of human dignity and notions of reasonableness that are characteristic of liberalism and that, at least with respect to the outcome of the dialogue and the decisions taken, are not sensitive to cultural perspectives.

Gutmann offers an assortment of arguments in favour of the claim that indvidual equality requires the recognition of cultural difference. I will mainly focus on the rather popular contention that culture is a primary good and argue that it constitutes a misunderstanding of the concept of primary goods. Culture is not amenable to distribution; neither is recognition. The notion of culture may provide insights as to what has shaped a life plan, but it is not related to the means that we need to be able to carry it out.

Kymlicka’s theory is open to criticism on the same account. In contrast to Gutmann, however, Kymlicka makes the importance of choice and the freedom to and capability of carrying out a life plan the basic thought of his argument. While culture may constitute (a part of) the context of choice, the primary importance of enabling the individual to choose will lead to the reaffirmation of a liberal notion of justice. Moreover, there is fairly little a state can do in order to maintain the cultural aspects of choice, as these acquire meaning not by being recognised, but by being shared with other members of a cultural community.

I.

While the politics of recognition constitutes a general framework rather than a unified theoretical approach, I think its main contribution to political philosophy can be stated as involving the redefinition of the notion of difference as related to and based on group belonging. While liberal multiculturalists espouse liberalism by embracing individual human dignity and equality as well as equal human rights, they part company with liberalism when it comes to defining difference.

For liberalism, the central assumption about human beings is that they differ in their aims and values, or, more generally, in their conceptions of the good. This kind of difference is first and foremost an individual one because it is related to human autonomy and the capacity to form conceptions of the good. Because all individuals share this human potential, they all deserve to be equally respected as persons. The norm of equal respect for persons is the rationale in liberalism of

the normative imperative of adjudicating differing interests so as to achieve equality between individuals. Individual equality and individual difference are thus inextricably intertwined.[1]

Most liberal multiculturalists subscribe to everything of the above. Yet while they accept liberal notions of justice as a minimum standard, they also phrase additional requirements for social justice and equality that go beyond liberal principles. These additional requirements are derived from a specific notion of difference that is distinct from the liberal one on two accounts. First, the politics of recognition focuses on groups (as collectives or groups of individuals) as bearers of differential features. Second, it emphasises the fundamental difference of human beings along the lines of cultural belonging rather than some commonality of humanity. There are different ways of justifying this redefinition of difference, yet all of them imply that cultural difference is more fundamental than individual differences of interest and in some way transcends them. Justice is, then, primarily a matter of recognising cultural differences.[2]

Authors like Chandran Kukathas therefore do not belong to the liberal multiculturalist category as defined here. While Kukathas' theory of free association implies a high degree of tolerance that may be considered amenable to the multicultural idea of a social order, this is merely a side-effect of his liberal theory which in itself does not raise any multiculturalist claims of justice.

The multiculturalist claim of justice, namely, that there is more to social justice than fair distribution and equal chances for individuals, is the central thought of the philosophical perspective of the politics of recognition and constitutes a common ground for a range of approaches that are otherwise rather diverse. Drawing on an array of well-established theories, the politics of recognition differ in their attitude towards liberal notions of justice. One variety of multiculturalism is based on critical theory and presents views that adopt, amongst others, feminist and socialist viewpoints. A prominent philosopher of this variety is Iris Marion Young. Theories of this kind are generally critical of liberalism. They regard it as biased against the deeper commitments of human beings, assimilationist in tendency, or simply suffering from an inherently flawed notion of justice.

Liberal multiculturalists, in contrast, advocate multiculturalism on the basis of liberal values. As moderate multiculturalists, liberal proponents of the politics of recognition wish to avoid both the collectivism of radical multiculturalism and the exaggerated individualism associated with liberalism. Liberal multiculturalists retain the liberal emphasis on the individual by claiming that recognising cultural difference is essential for the individual and thus for individual equality. While a liberal perspective is constitutive of these philosophers' self-conception, there are significant differences between the two main strands of liberal multiculturalism. Most liberal multiculturalists argue along either of the two lines or combine arguments so as to create a broader theoretical foundation.

The first strand focuses on the cultures themselves and demands that we ascribe to them value or worth. While this strand is part of liberal multiculturalism in that it intends its theory as a contribution to theories of what individual equality requires, the emphasis is on cultural belonging and intercultural equality as developed in and expressed by a public process of deliberation or dialogue. Charles Taylor is the main proponent of this strand of liberal multiculturalism. Bhikhu Parekh's theory further develops Taylor's main thoughts by introducing the notion of a bifocal intercultural dialogue. Taylor and Parekh pursue a more group-oriented approach that focuses on

cultures and cultural communities and draws on the thought that cultures are of value. From this point of view equality for (members of) cultural communities is not merely a formal requirement or a set of standardised measures, but can only be properly realised by understanding other cultures.

A second version of liberal multiculturalism reverses the focus of the argument and uses liberal assumptions about individuals as a starting point. From this point of view recognition is a necessary condition for truly realising liberal norms under conditions of multiculturalism. Cultural belonging, it is argued, is essential for properly understanding and promoting individual equality. Gutmann and Kymlicka present arguments that intend to demonstrate the individual's need for culture. Their positions derive part of their popularity from the claim of being a truer understanding of liberal justice.

II.

Most of us would agree that there is no prima facie reason for asserting the superiority or inferiority of any given culture. At first glance it therefore seems that the notion of equal value and worth of cultures is a suitable basis for the politics of recognition, considering that it is a normative theory concerned with culturally disadvantaged and oppressed persons and groups. Yet, as I will argue, when used as an argument for the importance of cultural belonging for social justice, the matter turns out to be more complicated than that. The problems of this line of reasoning will be shown to stand out quite clearly from Charles Taylor's defence of multiculturalism in his essay on "The Politics of Recognition" (Taylor 1994). Taylor begins by pointing out that our identity is formed in interchange and

> "is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, […] and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves" (Taylor 1994, p. 25).

Being recognised in one's cultural particularity is a basic need of every human being. Thus universal dignity leads to the politics of difference, for it demands that we give "due acknowledgement only to what is universally present–everyone has an identity–through recognising what is peculiar to each. The universal demand powers an acknowledgement of specificity" (Taylor 1994, p. 39). Having claimed that, Taylor goes on to say that the two notions actually "diverge quite seriously from each other" (Taylor 1994, p. 41). While the concept of equal dignity relies on "a *universal human potential*, a capacity that all humans share" (Taylor 1994, p. 41, emphasis in original), the politics of difference demands equal respect for all existing cultures.

When Taylor, two sections later, returns to the problem thus outlined, it is in order to find a way of reconciling a form of liberalism which he finds most hospitable to cultural differences (and thus espouses) with claims for equal respect for cultures often raised in contemporary multicultural societies. The latter claims, Taylor says somewhat vaguely, have something to recommend them, but are not unproblematic. The problem lies in the fact that equal respect involves an act of passing judgement upon the worth of specific cultures. But to respect a culture and finding value in it, Taylor argues, can only be the result of a free process of evaluating, not a foregone conclusion, just as much as we cannot demand "that we find the earth round or flat, the temperature of the air hot or cold" (Taylor 1994, p. 69). Reaching a positive judgement on demand is not a token of respect, but

an expression of condescension.

The solution that Taylor advocates lies in a process of judgement that is to be open-ended but informed by a number of guiding principles. The starting-point for our evaluation of other cultures should be the presumption that “all human cultures that have animated whole societies over some considerable stretch of time have something important to say to all human beings” (Taylor 1994, p. 66). For Taylor, this is a normative claim; it is something that we owe to all cultures, and denying it might just result from prejudice. The presumption of value (notice: not of equal value) also supports the claim that the politics of difference “build[s] on the already established principles of the politics of equal respect” (Taylor 1994, p. 68).

Taylor’s argument so far relies on two premises: first, that we should study other cultures; second, that we should do so with the intention of testing the validity of the claim that all cultures have some value. Taylor then adds a third qualification that is to guide us through studying cultures: keeping an open mind, broadening our horizon, “transforming our standards” (Taylor 1994, p. 67), even being transformed ourselves (Taylor 1994, p. 70). Under no circumstances should we impose our own limited and ethnocentric standards on other cultures because that would amount to disregarding difference instead of studying it. The solution, then, lies in finding “something midway between the inauthentic and homogenizing demand for recognition of equal worth, on the one hand, and the selfimmurement within ethnocentric standards, on the other” (Taylor 1994, p. 72).

While Taylor's essay is rich in thoughts and historical references, his own view is difficult to pin down. He carefully distances himself from some claims that have been raised by the politics of difference; yet he never questions what according to his interpretation is their basic assumption, namely, that cultures have to be recognised and that this has something to do with the value of their values and practices. Taylor is, however, very clear in stating the problem of compatibility of cultural difference with equal human dignity, and he has to be credited for pointing it out, since many theorists of difference assume as a matter of fact that both concepts are compatible.

Unfortunately the solution that he offers is less clearcut and rather sketchy. How Taylor imagines the process of studying cultures remains a riddle. First, there is the problem of defining who 'we' are. Taylor’s phrasing seems to imply that the cultures to be studied are not part of it, but stand apart from the 'we' that is then constituted by the 'core population' of a country. This view implies a dichotomy between 'us' and 'them' that is incompatible with the general thrust of cultural recognition but hardly avoidable given that Taylor’s concept requires a subject to do the studying and an object to which it is directed. Also, 'us' can be taken to mean several things, such as the citizen body, or the part of the population that is prepared to engage in studying cultures. We will then need some information about how much studying is required, in terms of both intensity and time. Even more difficult are the qualitative matters of studying cultures: How can we be sure that we observe the guiding principles? What are to be our standards, if we must not rely on our own, but neither (fully) on that of the culture in question?[3]

Given that Taylor’s idea of evaluating cultures is supposed to relate to the public sphere, studying culture must have a purpose beyond that of broadening people’s horizons. Something has to follow from the conclusions that we reach about a culture. But then surely it will make a difference whether we find a culture to be of high value or to be of little, no or even 'negative' value. The situation is even more complex if there is more than one culture to evaluate. Taylor would hardly

approve of actual policies that discriminate between cultures according to our judgement of their different worth. Yet if studying cultures has no impact on public policy – and thereby on public recognition – why do it in the first place?

Thus with respect to the operationalisational matters of Taylor's view of recognition, two problems stand out. First, it is difficult to see how an open-ended (personal) process of studying cultures can be an appropriate measure for arriving at decisions in the public realm.[4]

Second, the relationship between the process and its intended aim is more than doubtful. From Taylor's general thrust, one can presume that he wants the result of studying other cultures to lead to some form of cultural recognition and to be amenable to equality between members of different cultural groups. Yet between this aim and the process as such, there is both a logical and a substantial gap.

Logically speaking, to borrow Brian Barry's words,

> "[T]he inescapable problem is that cultures have propositional content. It is an inevitable aspect of any culture that it will include ideas to the effect that some beliefs are true and some false, and that some things are right and others wrong. […] [U]nless discriminations are made, ascribing value to something ceases to have any point" (Barry 2001, p. 270).

With respect to substance, in how far is a process of evaluating the worth of cultures appropriate for recognising cultural distinctiveness without questioning equality? One way of understanding this question is, again in Barry's words, to ask whether equal treatment requires the assumption of equal value of the culture in question or of its practices (Barry 2001, p. 271). Barry very convincingly shows that it does not. However, equal treatment is not Taylor's only concern. Rather, he wants equal treatment to be complemented by the recognition of difference. The latter element is what prompted him to introduce the concept of studying cultures in the first place. Yet while his general depiction of the issues at stake is very much concerned with individual equality, the solution he proposes is not. Even if we strictly adhere to all of the guiding principles,[5]

it is far from clear that our judgement will have anything to do with the equal worth of cultures, not to mention the overall result of millions of individual processes of judgement. Maybe our opinions about the cultures will be in terms of beauty or aesthetic value; maybe we will come to the conclusion that some of the cultures we studied are considerably more valuable than others.

One might argue that the current state of affairs does not guarantee equality to cultures either and that some well-intentioned studying of other cultures can only make things better. The worrying part about it, though, is the introduction of the notion of value. For while Taylor clearly is concerned with equality, there is nothing in his outline of the process of judgement to ensure that the outcome consists of the equal worth of all cultures. Yet by advocating a public process of evaluating cultures, Taylor commits himself to accepting the result regardless of its content. The forces that are thereby unleashed might prove seriously harmful to cultural equality, and might also have repercussions on our belief in individual equality.

Given these problems with the concept of evaluating cultures, one cannot help wondering why

Taylor does not instead use as a basis for the demand for recognition his own concept of identity formation that he develops earlier in the paper. The reason seems to be his view that identity formation belongs to the intimate sphere and is distinct from what can be argued for in the public sphere on which he wishes to concentrate (Taylor 1994, p. 37).

The first interesting point to note here is that Taylor is usually seen as advocating a public form of recognition for cultures by way of the identity argument. This is clearly not compatible with how Taylor conceives of his own argument. It is “the intimate sphere, where we understand the formation of identity and the self as taking place in a continuing dialogue and struggle with significant others” (Taylor 1994, p. 37). Turning to the public sphere, Taylor then continues by elaborating his idea of what equal recognition could and should mean. Even though changes in the notion of identity are claimed to have given rise to the demands of the politics of difference, Taylor does not mention any substantial relationship between the two. If not normatively related to people’s identity formed in human interchange, what makes studying cultures a moral imperative? Unfortunately, Taylor does not say much about this.

Secondly, it is interesting to note that identity as belonging to the intimate sphere concerns the individual, whereas equal recognition as belonging to the public sphere for Taylor is a matter of cultures. In his critique of Taylor’s essay, Lawrence Blum identifies three entities as candidates for recognition (Blum 1998, p. 53): the individual; cultural groups; and cultures themselves. Only towards the first two, he claims, is recognition appropriately directed. Blum takes Taylor to mean that it is cultural groups that should be recognised, and regards his emphasis on cultures as merely a terminological lapse. Yet it is not clear why this should be the case. Surely the process of evaluating cultures refers to the cultures themselves. This is obvious from the wording Taylor uses; but it is also implicit in the argument. Taylor cannot and does not ask us to judge persons (or groups of persons) and evaluate the worth of human beings in light of their cultures. Moreover, Taylor wants us to judge the contribution of cultures to all human beings; his argument therefore extends beyond the claim that cultures matter to those people who belong to them.

III.

Whereas Taylor is reticent on why we should engage in studying other cultures, Bhikhu Parekh develops an extensive argument about the benefits of intercultural dialogue. Parekh distinguishes two dimensions of a culture. First, he takes the term to denote a cultural community. A community has a right to its culture and, “for a variety of reasons”, this right is to be respected (Parekh 2000, p. 176). Moreover, all communities are equally entitled to the right to culture. Though Parekh is not explicit on this, one might conclude that on the first dimension, all cultures as communities are entitled to equal respect. The second dimension of a culture, according to Parekh, concerns its content and character. How much respect we have for a culture as regards its content depends on our assessment of it. It follows that cultures are not entitled to equal respect regarding their values and practices. Yet Parekh thinks that almost every culture can be beneficial to members of other cultures:

> "Since human capacities and values conflict, every culture realises a limited range of them and neglects, marginalises and suppresses others. However rich it might be, no culture embodies all that is valuable in human life and develops the full range of human possibilities. Different cultures thus correct and complement each other, expand each

> other's horizon of thought and alert each other to new forms of human fulfilment." (Parekh 2000, p. 167)

Moreover, cultural diversity is also a condition of human freedom, enabling us to become aware of the contingency of our own culture, and it "creates a climate in which different cultures can engage in a mutually beneficial dialogue" (Parekh 2000, p. 168).

The intercultural dialogue is then presented as a method for dealing with controversial cultural practices like polygamy or female circumcision. The dialogue starts from a society's operative public values but also offers a "welcome opportunity" to reassess the operative values (Parekh 2000, p. 270). While the majority defends its operative public values, the minority defends the practice in question, thus initiating a "bifocal dialogue" (Parekh 2000, p. 271). There may be tendencies to be "unduly defensive", but the stronger motivation of exploring "common interests and values" (Parekh 2000, p. 271) will prevail. The dialogue will lead to "an inherently tentative consensus that helps us decide on a generally acceptable response to disputed practices" (Parekh 2000, p. 267).

Parekh discusses some of these disputed practices by way of an example. He lists a number of arguments in defence of female circumcision, and then goes on to refute them with perfectly reasonable counter-arguments. The practice, he concludes, needs to be banned. Both the arguments in favour and against female circumcision are well-known and part of what can already be considered a form of public dialogue that has taken place in some Western countries. Yet neither opponents nor adherents of the practice seem to have been persuaded of the benefit of the other culture's stance. A majority population of Western countries is still very firm in claiming that female circumcision is outrageous, and hearing reasons why this should not be the case has not changed anything about that. Yet female circumcision is still in practice and deemed proper by some. Or consider the debates about headscarves. Certainly there has been an extensive public discourse on that topic, reasons given and rejected, cultures explained and defended, yet not even a tentative consensus has been reached.

This shows two things: first, that we do not need a sophisticated intercultural dialogue in order to evaluate the practices of other cultures, since no argument along the lines of "it makes sense from my point of view" will bring 'us' to deviate from the standards of reasonableness and our interpretation of human dignity, and that is precisely why Parekh's treatment of the examples and his solutions are so very convincing; second, that the intercultural dialogue that already takes place, albeit in simpler forms, often fails to convince the party that loses out.

One might object that public dialogues on contested cultural issues have actually had at least some positive effect on the occurrence of practices like female circumcision. Still, some adherents of cultural practices will always remain unconvinced, and in these cases the decision to ban a practice will have to be enforced by law. This in turn raises the question of when one side of the debate can legitimately decide that no further understanding will be gained by continuing the dialogue. The problem is particularly relevant in cases where the practice in question involves the infliction of serious bodily harm on members of the culture; then a decision will have to be taken whether the banning of the practice can wait until an intercultural dialogue has taken place.

It is obvious why an intercultural dialogue expresses respect for other cultures; it is less obvious

what it has to do with individual equality for the members of differing cultures. Consider the example of female circumcision. Imagine that after a bifocal intercultural dialogue neither of the two sides is prepared to give in (this is what is actually happening in most Western countries). Yet a decision has to be taken, and the government unconditionally prohibits the practice. Now the cultural minority that favours the practice will have had its say; but it will also have met with public accusations, and it loses the right to practice part of its cultural customs. There is nothing about the outcome itself that pays attention to the multicultural perspective or to its supposed aims such as cultural equality, respect for the range of possibilities of leading one's life or recognition of the importance of culture. Of course the same outcome would have been reached under a liberal system. But that just proves the point because in issues like that, individual human dignity has to take precedence over cultural arguments. As long as an intercultural dialogue consists of the give and take of reasons, the decisions are very likely to be identical with those of liberalism and this points to cultural equality being limited by universal notions of human dignity that are traditionally associated with liberalism but that even liberal multiculturalists seem to accept.[6]

Studying cultures and leading intercultural dialogues are doubtlessly appealing concepts for human understanding under conditions of cultural diversity, but they display an academic naivety concerning the substantivity of issues involved. If human beings behaved like these theories recommend them to – sensitive to the contingency and the limitations of one's own culture, understanding even those standpoints that are remotest from it, reacting to practices that contradict one's deeply held values by expanding one's horizon and reassessing what one believes in – if human beings were like that, it is highly unlikely that we would have been in need of a theory of multiculturalism in the first place. As it is, theories (or, as Parekh prefers to call his, perspectives on human life) that are based on opinions and wishes about how people *should* behave are a fairly weak basis for taking collective decisions about what social justice involves.

IV.

In her introduction to Taylor’s essay on multiculturalism, Amy Gutmann makes it very clear that it is equality she is concerned with (Gutmann 1994). True equality, she asserts, requires the recognition of cultural identities. Gutmann, like most authors in favour of the politics of recognition, is concerned with the question of how cultural differences should be recognised rather than why. The following paragraph contains all the argument she offers as to why recognition is imperative:

> “Do most people need a secure cultural context to give meaning and guidance to their choices in life? If so, then a secure cultural context also ranks among the primary goods, basic to most people’s prospects for living what they can identify as a good life. And liberal democratic states are obligated to help disadvantaged groups preserve their culture against intrusions by majoritarian or ‘mass’ cultures. Recognising and treating members of some groups as equals now seems to require public institutions to acknowledge rather than ignore cultural particularities, at least for those people whose self-understanding depends on the vitality of their culture. This requirement of political recognition of cultural particularity – extended to all individuals – is compatible with a form of universalism that counts the culture and cultural context valued by individuals as among their basic interests.” (Gutmann 1994, p. 5)

There are several separate arguments in these lines. First, Gutmann argues that culture is the frame in which an individual's life plan acquires shape and meaning. It is not quite clear why this directly leads to the conclusion that culture is a primary good in the sense envisaged by Rawls. According to Rawls, primary goods are those social values that every person wants for the fulfilment of his or her life plan. They "are to be distributed equally unless an unequal distribution of any, or all, of these values is to everyone's advantage" (Rawls 1999, p. 54). Culture, by contrast, cannot be distributed, let alone be distributed equally. Culture, at least in the view of the politics of recognition, is to be recognised, an approach that is conceptually as well as normatively distinct from the view of justice as distribution. Rawls' theory will therefore not be of any help here, nor can it be expected to.

Moreover, primary goods are just that: they are primary. They are not indirectly effective in the sense of somehow contributing to our living a good life through various channels, but are instruments that we consciously use for turning our lives into the lives we deem good. Otherwise the list of goods that are of some use to people would be literally endless. Since all kinds of things are important to people, we need to know in how far culture differs from other things that cannot reasonably be considered primary goods such as having loving parents, or learning to appreciate the value of making informed choices.

One could argue that culture is implied in the primary good Rawls calls "the social bases of self-respect". Self-respect, according to Rawls, has two aspects. First, it means the conviction that one's one life plan is valuable and worth carrying out. Second, it applies to the confidence of a person to be able to direct his or her life so as to agree with his life plan. Clearly a person needs these motivations in order to wish to carry out a life plan at all. This is, for Rawls, a matter of belonging to an association or "community of shared interests to which he belongs and where he finds his endeavours confirmed by his associates. And for the most part this assurance is sufficient whenever in public life citizens respect one another's ends and adjudicate their political claims in ways that also support their self-esteem" (Rawls 1999, p. 388). The Rawlsian kind of respect and confirmation that we need from others is thus directed towards our being purposive beings capable of forming and pursuing life plans. Whether it is culture or something else that shapes our life plans is not a consideration that the idea of primary goods entertains.[7]

There is a second argument or, rather, a second claim in Gutmann's essay on multiculturalism, namely, that the liberal democratic state has an obligation to help disadvantaged groups preserve their culture against intrusion from other cultures. It is not clear whether Gutmann wants this claim to be understood as an extension of the first. In any way, culture here is not any more a matter of individual life plans, but of group preservation. The state is assigned an active role in preventing cross-cultural influence or encroachment. In a multicultural society, keeping cultural groups apart will probably require some drastic measures that are likely to impair the peaceful living together of cultural groups and may also come into conflict with realising equality for members of cultural groups. Take the issue of arranged marriages in Asian cultures. From the viewpoint of Western culture, arranged marriages seriously infringe upon the freedom of women (and men) to lead their lives according to their own wishes and decisions. Yet while this could or should justify interventionist measures, Asian parents might regard any such effort as an intrusion upon their cultural way of life. There is thus an ambiguity in speaking about disadvantaged groups: we need to decide whether we see disadvantage primarily in the liberal sense of individuals having fewer or

less valuable chances in life, or in the sense of cultures being disregarded and disrespected. Even if concentrating exclusively on the second aspect, it is far from obvious that cultural group preservation can help to redress this form of disadvantage. Since disadvantage has a comparative and relational element, retaining cultural purity with the support of the state may help members of cultural groups to retain their cultures, but that in turn will not necessarily persuade the majority population to recognise the cultures. It might also, as in the case of Asian women, come into conflict with other, noncultural group categories, such as gender, that are also relevant to social equality.

As a third point, Gutmann returns to individual members of cultural groups and claims that treating them as equals requires the public acknowledgement of cultural particularities, at least for those individuals who wish to be so acknowledged. Beginning from culture as a general framework for choice, turning then to the state being obliged to support the retention of cultural purity, Gutmann finally arrives at the middling claim of recognising all those individuals as being culturally particular who want to be thus recognised, while ignoring cultural particularities in all other cases. Yet in the next sentence Gutmann claims that recognition should be political and extended to all individuals. The context is the requirement of treating people as equals, yet the explicit requirement is the political recognition of individual particularity. Gutmann is not very precise as to how the recognised individuals will profit from recognition, and why equal treatment is connected to recognition. Gutmann then suggest that this notion is compatible with seeing culture as one of the basic interests of individuals. But regarding culture as an individual interest is quite a different thing and leads to different conclusions concerning equal treatment. Thinking in categories of interest leads back to the liberal notion of adjudicating between different interests and is not connected in any obvious way to cultural particularity.

Where individual equality comes in remains unclear. We are not told whether culture matters more to individuals than other things do, why recognition is the appropriate form of dealing with it, and in how far culture differs from individual interests. Culture matters, and it matters to individuals.[8]

This is how far the argument reaches, and surely we need to know more about the relationship between cultural belonging and the individual to say more about how cultural difference relates to individual equality.

V.

In his book "Liberalism, Community, and Culture", Will Kymlicka has provided an elaborate theory on why and how matters of culture should be incorporated into liberalism, and more than fifteen years after its publication, this is still considered the ultimate scholarly work on the issue. Kymlicka’s argument proceeds in two steps and aims at demonstrating that the importance of culture results from the very same values that liberalism cherishes. First, Kymlicka argues that cultural belonging has a more important place in liberal theory than is commonly recognised. The importance of cultural belonging and thus of cultural recognition lies in culture constituting a context of choice. Second, Kymlicka points to the discrimination and disadvantage to which members of minority cultures are subject. On this basis he raises claims for minority rights.

Kymlicka emphasises that his defence of the value of cultural membership is situated within liberalism, and based on a concern for equal rights and the just distribution of benefits and burdens.

He accepts Rawls' premise that the freedom to form and revise beliefs about value is central to the individual. In order to do this, Kymlicka claims, we have to choose from a range of options, and that range is provided by and dependent upon the culture we belong to. Thus patterns of activity acquire a meaning that transcends mere physical movement, and become potential models and roles that appear to us as worthwhile. Kymlicka concludes:

> "Liberals should be concerned with the fate of cultural structures, not because they have some moral status of their own, but because it's only through having a rich and secure cultural structure that people can become aware, in a vivid way, of the options available to them, and intelligently examine their value." (Kymlicka 1989, p. 165)

This approach thus develops from the central place of meaningful choice in individuals' lives. Its main tenets are widely accepted, and the critical analysis focuses mainly on the question of whether the theory can defend maintaining not just any cultural context, but that of every individual's own culture. This has led to doubts as to how much protection from inward or outward influence a cultural group can legitimately demand. The discussion has induced Kymlicka to add another component to the argument, falling back on claims about deep personal bonds to cultures. While rejecting the communitarian view of the self, Kymlicka claims that human beings are deeply connected to their own cultures. Integrating into another culture is therefore both costly and difficult as well as against "something to which one is reasonably entitled" (Kymlicka 1995, p. 86).

Seeing both elements – culture as providing a context of choice and culture as the object of deep human bonds – as complementary parts of one theory (as Kymlicka himself implies) raises certain problems. As John Arthur argues from a liberal perspective, there is a tension between the autonomous self of liberalism that questions traditional values and given modes of life, and the self that is in some important respect tied to a certain cultural identity (Arthur 1999, p. 137).[9]

If we take the notion of culture as a context of choice to be Kymlicka's first and most original contribution to the debate, what arguments does it provide for justifying cultural recognition?

In accordance with liberal theories, Kymlicka's argument is based on the assumption that individuals should be free to lead their lives as they choose. His contribution is meant to specify the condition for this basic freedom to be effective, namely, a rich and secure context of choice as provided by one's culture. If we see individual choice as a process, to which part of it does Kymlicka address his theory? The first issue is the individual and his or her right to choose a life plan; to this end the individual has to have a range of options to choose from. But there is a step in between the two, a step that, for example, Rawls' theory takes into account: the individual needs to have both the capacity and the wish to make an informed choice, to believe that the choice is right and to have the means, both material and immaterial, to live according to what one has chosen. Kymlicka's argument may well explain where our options come from and why they are meaningful to us. But from the perspective of choice, this is surely not the most important issue. If we care about choice, we first and foremost have to make sure that people make informed choices and can realise their life plans, that they live in an environment that is conducive to freedom and autonomy of mind and endows them with the means of evaluating options, and that they have the necessary goods for that purpose. As to social justice, this implies ensuring that every individual has the same chances for choosing and realising his or her life plan.

What is the state supposed to do given these considerations? When Kymlicka writes about the context of choice as justification for multicultural politics, one can only wonder what function cultural recognition is supposed to fulfil. Kymlicka explicitly rejects any interference by the state that aims at preserving cultures. Members of cultural communities should be “free to modify the character of the culture, should they find its traditional ways of life no longer worth while” (Kymlicka 1989, p. 167). If recognition is not directed at the cultures themselves, but at individuals, in how far can an individual profit from recognition when the context of choice is beyond his choosing? If, for example, the state grants a group right to certain religious groups to slaughter animals according to their traditions, even if they violate animal protection clauses, the individual gain lies in the unimpeded exercise of that cultural practice. The cultural group right itself, however, has no influence on the culture as a context of choice that gives meaning and security to a person's life plan. Recognition provides for choice only in a very basic sense of the word: it allows for a number of practices to be carried out. It cannot, however, convey the meaning that makes these practices valuable in the first place. Since cultural practices derive their meaning not only from being, for example, set down in canonical texts, but to a large extent also from being shared with other members of the culture, there is a limit to what public recognition can do for culture as a context of choice.

In this paper I have argued that liberal multiculturalism is neither a necessary nor a convincing extension of liberalism. Liberal multiculturalism is based on the presupposition that there is more to human difference than the notion of differing conceptions of the good is able to capture, and that there is therefore more to social justice than fair distribution and equal chances for individuals. I have analysed the theories of Taylor, Parekh, Gutmann and Kymlicka as to how they justify and spell out these additional requirements of social justice. I have concluded that the most prominent proponents of liberal multiculturalism are not convincing in arguing for the normative requirement of cultural recognition. Taylor’s approach is underspecified with respect to the relationship between the process of evaluating cultures and its outcome. Gutmann’s theory fails to bridge the gaps between the individual, cultural belonging and positive duties of the state. Parekh’s and Kymlicka’s theories lead back to liberalism. This allows the conclusion that the idea of cultural difference has little of substance to add to the liberal view of social justice for which there already is an abundance of theories.

Liberal views of social justice are by their very nature sensitive towards inequalities and discrimination of all sorts, and rightly so. If and when individual equality is undermined or only partially implemented in a way that suggests a patterned realisation of justice, liberals have reason to be concerned. Yet the issue at stake then is not cultural difference. Members of cultural communities are discriminated against not because of their specific cultural identity, but for the mere fact of belonging to a certain group (Barry 2001, pp. 305-6). Equality, then, is not about recognising cultural difference as such, but rather about ensuring that individuals are treated equally, regardless of the cultural group they belong to.[10]

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Notes

1. Liberalism, at least according to this interpretation, is therefore not susceptible to Parekh’s

critique of monism, namely, that it denies the moral significance of differences (Parekh 2000, p. 125). His appeal to see human beings as both similar and different therefore constitutes no novelty, and his own account of the nature of human beings fails to show in how far cultural difference is different from the kind of difference that liberalism is set on accommodating.

2. This is distinct from attending to group difference as a means of tackling discrimination in order to restore individual equality. Measures like affirmative action belong to this latter category. In so far as it implies recognition, this is temporary and aims at establishing a kind of equality that ignores differences. Affirmative action is therefore not problematic in principle from a liberal point of view, as it constitutes a “natural extension of the classical liberal conception of constitutional civil and political rights” (Raz 1995, p. 173). For the same reason it is neither a sufficient nor an adequate realisation of the politics of recognition.

3. Taylor offers a more elaborate view of understanding other cultures in another essay (Taylor 1995). There he draws on the concept of understanding cultures in order to show how human sciences can make human behaviour intelligible. Our home culture, Taylor argues, sets the forms and limits of interpreting our own motives and actions as well as of understanding other people's behaviour. Understanding others is thus always a comparative enterprise that starts from our own standards of intelligibility. But understanding can also change and be expanded. Meeting foreign cultures will make us reinterpret the limits of intelligibility, and will change the contours of our own culture by widening the range of possibilities of human behaviour. Realising this model, Taylor admits, "will be very difficult in practice." (Taylor 1995, p. 149) It will be even more so if we leave the context of the human sciences and see it as an endeavour in which people should engage who have no scientific aspirations.

4. This is one of the objections that Brian Barry puts forward against Iris Marion Young’s and Nancy Fraser’s accounts of multiculturalism (Barry 2001, p. 269). Even though Taylor’s claims are somewhat more moderate, the parallels are well worth noticing.

5. When describing the presumption that all cultures have something important to say to all human beings, Taylor explicitly states that there is no reason to presume that all forms of cultural ‘output’ should be of equal value (Taylor 1994, p. 66). Yet a few pages later, Taylor seems to have changed his mind, albeit without informing the reader why: “What there is is the presumption of equal worth I described above: a stance we take in embarking on the study of the other.” (Taylor 1994, p. 72) Even if we do start from this assumption, the objection that this does not say anything about the result is still valid.

6. Jeremy Waldron has provided an excellent account of the limits of deliberation for recognition (Waldron 2000). Waldron argues that an opinion cannot claim any special weight because it is connected to a culture or identity. See also Barry 2001, p. 253.

7. There is, on the practical level, another argument against seeing self-respect as including cultural belonging. If, as Gutmann argues, self-respect is connected to choosing and carrying out a life plan within the framework provided by culture, then we should not grant recognition to those cultures that restrict their members' freedom to choose. As Kukathas writes in a critique of Kymlicka, "many cultures […] do not place such value on the individual's freedom to choose his ends. Often, the individual and his interests are subordinated to the community. […] If choice and critical

reflection are most highly valued, then it is cultural interference rather than cultural protection that is required" (Kukathas 1992, pp. 120-21). Kymlicka has replied to the objection by pointing out that how to deal with illiberal cultures is a question that concerns the practical implementation of the right to culture, but does not affect the argument for its justification (Kymlicka 1992, p. 144). Yet it seems that the justificatory argument is weakened if its practical implementation shows that it contradicts its purported aim.

8. If one looks for further guidance to Gutmann's book "Identity in Democracy" (Gutmann 2003), one will be disappointed. Gutmann does not show any more concern there with why culture matters; the objective of the book is rather to develop a theory of the political behaviour of organized groups whose founding principle is identity. The arguments that she adduces for why claims of cultural recognition are justified consist of: culture as a context of choice; culture as providing a sense of social security; self-respect. The latter, though, is not so much an argument as a claim: "To support self-respect among civic equals, democratic societies must also support the particular contexts that orient people's lives. Particular cultures constitute the context within which particular people can be self-respecting and exercise equal freedom, depending on their cultural upbringing" (Gutmann 2003, p. 42). Somehow the central Rawlsian idea, pursuing a life plan, has dropped out, and the context of choice has moved back in.

9. A similar point has been made by Rainer Forst. Introducing the notion of identity in explaining the value of cultural membership, Forst argues, means seeing culture not as a context of choice, but as a "context of identity" (Forst 1997, p. 66).

10. I would like to thank Baukje Prins, Boudewijn de Bruin and Jan-Willem van der Rijt for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this essay.

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