

Liberalism and Multiculturalism: Rawls, Kymlicka, Parekh

- Beginning from the beginning: Salman Rushdie on what is termed ‘the fact of multiculturalism’
- But is every distinct social group worthy of equal value and treatment? (cf. Seth Godin’s ‘tribes’)

“the liberal focus on the individual as the core unit of political and moral concern is too abstract. We are who we are... because of the social context from which we inherit our values [and which] serves as a filter between us and the wider world.” Thus, protecting “legal and political recognition of group rights” may be necessary “to observe certain religious holidays or practices, to make judgments about certain medical procedures, or to organize marital or family affairs in accordance to custom.” (211-2) Liberalism, on the other hand, “champions the interest of the dominant group against the real interests of other groups”.

Liberal monism → liberal pluralism → liberal multiculturalism → multiculturalism → relativism

- Following our text, we will examine neither liberal monism (already discussed in Rawls *Theory of Justice*) nor relativism (to be discussed next class, on feminism and antifoundationalism)
- Should there be any other isms on this progression: **cosmopolitanism**? Others?

Rawls’ *Political Liberalism* (liberal pluralism): ‘reasonable pluralism’ and the **overlapping consensus** under which “all reasonable people regardless of their ethno-cultural background are able to accept the same core principles of justice for the sake of stable political interaction” (215)

- Liberal “pluralism is itself the outcome of human reason under conditions of freedom. Monism could only ever be maintained by the oppressive use of state power”...the essence of ‘political liberalism, as against ‘comprehensive liberalism’, is that “it attempt[s] to maintain impartiality between moral doctrines by refusing to address the moral topics on which those doctrines divide.”
- But “can political liberalism really be neutral between differing conceptions of the good?...*Rawls’ argument turns on the view that people in democratic societies are both rational and reasonable,*” and individuals with different moral preferences can agree on an ‘overlapping consensus’

Will Kymlicka’s *Multicultural Citizenship* (liberal multiculturalism): “liberals can, and should, accept a wide range of group differentiated rights for national minorities and ethnic groups, without sacrificing their core commitments to individual freedom and social equality’

- What distinguishes **multi-national** from **polyethnic** states?
- Means of redress: 1) self-government rights, 2) polyethnic rights and 3) special representation rights

Bhikhu Parekh’s *Rethinking Multiculturalism* (multiculturalism): “takes liberal and non-liberal points of view as equal partners in political dialogue and works from there” (216)

- While relativism “ignores cross-culturally shared human properties and misunderstands the nature of culture...liberal monism overplays the significance of our shared human nature to the extent that it ignores difference as morally irrelevant...[and thus] fails to recognize the ways in which culture mediates, constitutes and reconstitutes moral value” (227)
- **Pluralist universalism** and intersubjectivity [and the case of Sikh exemptions - 229]: “moral principles do not leap out of nature. You cannot say ‘this is natural therefore this is right’. This is because nature is dialectically derived...we must avoid privileging either those things that make us similar or those things that divide us when we make judgements about the best sort of life. This is the essence of pluralist universalism.” (229)