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Accommodating Cultural Difference and National Solidarity in Iran: In Search of a Conceptual Framework

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Abstract

As a consequence of increasing literature on multiculturalism, cultural identity and cultural self-rule during the past four decades or so, the concept of nation-state and the realm of national government have been subject to dramatic changes. In a similar trend, due to the development of globalization, revising the classical functions of the state machinery looks more urgent than ever. Different accounts of national and cultural identity, widespread demands of recognizing cultural difference through arguing for the rights of cultural communities living within the boundaries of a country, and the changing nature of concepts like national security and interests, suggest that political theorists should look for a more adequate conception of national integrity which consists with such changes as variety of alternatives to the classical interpretation. Having John Rawls's overlapping consensus in mind, I shall offer a similar model among cultural communities in Iran by employing the historically situated and shared Iranian-religious identity and granting cultural autonomy.

Keywords: Cultural diversity, National solidarity, Overlapping consensus, Iranian identity, Cultural autonomy.

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Introduction

The existence of cultural diversity and different cultural communities should not be viewed as recent phenomena; the problem is probably as old as human social life itself. The history of cultural differences can be traced back to the first stages of the written history. In the ancient Greece and Rome, for instance, in order to be recognized as citizens, strangers were required to participate in religious rituals of the main society (De Coulange, 1980: 193-195). What can be distinguished as quite recent, however, is the demand for the recognition of such differences. Thus, if once tolerating cultural minorities was the center of debates over cultural diversity, it has been relocated on how decision making procedures should be formed as to accommodate the respect for cultural difference.

The practical implications of such a transition of the politics of cultural identity leads to the reshaping of political institutions of the conventional national government model; an argument which has been the focus of a significant number of studies during recent years. The consequences of the failure of the idea of 'one nation-one culture' in capturing the real nature of contemporary societies, therefore, have gone much further than explaining the reality of different cultural identities, to numerous arguments on cultural minority rights and the protection of their different identities against the essentially assimilatory policies of the national governments.

It means that culturally different groups, which have been marginalized by the mainstream dominant culture, would make broader claims for equality and power. As will be discussed below, demands of multiculturalism have gone far beyond claims of equality of rights to questions concerning how and to which extend different cultural minorities, which are among the most salient and vexing on the political agenda of many democratic societies, are to be recognized. They run against the dominant image of culture as a homogenous entity, on the basis of which claims of equal right of citizenship are often made. This concerns differences which constitute the very identities of citizens. It suggests that a democracy is letting citizens down when major institutions fail to take account of their diverse and particular identities.

Tracing back for the origins of the movement, as Turner points out, the debate over multiculturalism emerged as the consequence of "the revolt against the canon in English and American literary and the Eurocentric in

history (manifested, for example, by the influence of subaltern studies and the concern with colonial and postcolonial resistance to capitalist exploitation and the Western hegemony). The development of *cultural studies*, strongly influenced by the work of the Center for Cultural Studies in the United Kingdom, also formed part of this intellectual landscape and directly influenced the rise of multiculturalism" (Turner, 1994: 416). In Terence Turner's words:

[t]he term has come to be used primarily in connection with demands on behalf of black and other minority groups for separate and equal representation in college curricula and extra-academic cultural programs and events. It also has assumed more general connotations as an ideological stance towards participation by such minorities in national cultures and societies and the changing nature of national and transnational cultures themselves. As a code of word for minority demands for separate recognition in academic and other cultural institutions, multiculturalism tends to become a form of identity politics in which the concept of culture becomes a merged with that of ethnic identity (Turner, 1994: 407-408).

Furthermore, pervasive processes of globalization, emerging as a result of the creation of new international organizations (such as the World Trade Organization), the enlargement of the scope of the influence of already established international organizations (such as the Security Council of the UN, International Monetary Fund and the World Bank), the ongoing development of the internet and social media, and the formation of regional corporative organizations (such as EC and Shanghai Cooperation Organization), have seriously undermined both the degree of the power and the nature of the authority of national governments.

Consequently, an important job for political theory and practice concerns with adjusting sub-national diversity into the idea of national integrity on the one hand, and rethinking national security and interests on the face of developing influence of transnational organizations on the other. Obviously, only those countries that avoid leaving the issue into politicians' hands with their everyday interests and limited knowledge, and employ all their available intellectual resources to understand the multi-dimensional nature of the issues at stake, would be able to adopt an active role in the new situation. It is for this very reason, therefore, that in the first section of the present study, some of the main aspects of the problem of cultural diversity

will be discussed briefly. The second section explores some approaches employed by conservatives and liberals to explain the nature of the problem. Next, I shall explain the communitarian account, mainly of Alasdair MacIntyre, which I believe as more adequate way of understanding the issue. It will be followed by a look at the basic concepts involved. After that, some criticisms which have been made on the traditionally adopted views on national integrity will be briefly explained. Finally, I shall offer a model which seems to be more adequate for accommodating cultural diversity to national integrity.

Cultural diversity in political theory and practice

As mentioned above, since the second half of the twentieth century, many political theorists as well as politicians of countries with a culturally diverse population, have been involved with finding ways of explaining and theorizing the multicultural character of modern societies and of its accommodation to the modern politics. With the opening of higher education to women and members of cultural minorities, issues of race, sex and class have taken on a new urgency both as academic issues and in the day-to-day life of the university. John Arthur and Amy Shapiro have classified the responses to these demands into four main groups. First, demands for more women and minority professors, ethnic and gender studies departments, and a curriculum that includes voices not traditionally included. Second, demands for codes of conduct which ban sexual harassment and date rape. Third, arguments for abandoning the insistence on free speech and enacting codes of punishing racist, sexist and harassing speech. Fourth, demands for taking affirmative action policies that give preference in hiring and admissions to women and persons of colour(Arthur and Shapiro, 1995: 1-2).

In political theory, a vast literature on the politics of cultural diversity has emerged in the last few decades. Conservatives, Liberals, Communitarians and Feminists have argued for different understandings of the problem and offered different solutions. The Closing of the American Mind by Allan Bloom has been recognized as an outstanding conservative example in this respect. Bloom recognizes multiculturalism as the fruit of moral and epistemological relativism most fashionable within contemporary American universities:

Openness_ and the relativism that makes it the only plausible stance in the face of various claims to truth various ways of life and kinds of human beings_ is the great insight of our times. The true believer is the real danger. The study of history and of culture teaches that the entire world was mad in the past; men always thought they were right, and that led to wars, persecutions, slavery, xenophobia, racism, and chauvinism. The point is not to correct the mistakes and really be right; rather it is not to think you are right at all (Bloom, 1995:9).

Against this, Bloom asserts the need for the West for justification of its ways or values, discovery of nature, philosophy and science which he holds its 'cultural imperative' and believes the deprivation of which would result in its collapse (Ibid: 17). Bloom observes such indifference towards the western heritage as the consequence of the bad education students nowadays receive:

Young Americans have less and less knowledge of and interest in foreign places. In the past, there were many students who actually knew something about and love England, France, Germany, or Italy, for they dreamed of living there or thought their lives would be made more interesting by assimilating their languages and literatures. Such students have almost disappeared, replaced at most by students who are interested in the political problems of the Third World countries and in helping them to modernize, with due respect to their old cultures, of course (Ibid: 14).

What is lost, therefore, is a kind of education which would learn from classical texts the better ways of life:

Gone is the real historical sense of a Machiavelli who wrested a few hours from each busy day in which "to don regal and courtly garments, enter the courts of the ancients and speak with them (Ibid: 14).

The liberal attitude towards cultural diversity, however, has taken a distinguishably different track. Although liberals have usually been thought to be hostile to cultural difference, as Will Kymlicka indicates in his interesting study of the history of liberal views on national minority, such hostility is rather a recent phenomenon within the tradition. He shows that in nineteenth-century England, for example, there were two liberal views on minority rights: On the one hand, there were liberals like J.S. Mill who called for a common national identity which was deeply tied to an ethnocentric disintegration of smaller national groups. On the other hand,

however, there were many nineteenth- and early twentieth-century liberals (e.g. Lord Acton and Alfred Zimmern) who defended minority rights on the grounds of the belief that individual freedom is tied in some important way to membership in one's national group; and that group-specific rights can promote equality between the minority and majority (Kymlicka, 1995:57). But as a result of the fall of the British Empire, the rise of 'Cold War' conflict, and the prominence of American theorists within post-war liberalism, the heated pre-war debate about national minorities amongst liberals has given way to a virtual silence (Ibid: 56). Kymlicka then points out the three features of the post-war world which have converted this silence into antagonism towards the recognition of national rights by contemporary liberals: disillusionment with the minority rights scheme of the League of Nations; the American racial desegregation movement; and the ethnic revival amongst immigrant groups in the United States during the 60s and 70s. Contemporary liberal theorists, consequently, neglect arguments of minority rights on the ground that such rights are inconsistent with political unity. Moreover, Kymlicka argues that many contemporary liberals have acquired the belief that minority rights are inherently in conflict with liberal principles. Consequently, liberals today insist that the liberal commitment to individual liberty precludes the acceptance of collective rights, and that the liberal commitment to universal (color-blind) rights precludes the acceptance of group-specific rights (Ibid: 68). Kymlicka claims, however, that these bald statements are no part of the liberal tradition: "Few if any liberals, until very recently, supposed that liberal principles allowed Universal individual rights. What contemporary liberals take to be well-established liberal principles are in fact novel additions to the liberal cannon"(Ibid: 68).

As will be seen in the next section, it is his goal to work out a defensible liberal account in respect to cultural diversity. We may turn now to a more philosophical analysis of the debate in the next section.

Universalism vs. Particularism

The conservative and liberal positions towards multiculturalism should be clear by now through the statements cited above. It is now time to further the discussion through a closer examination of their claims.

The Conservative Perspective

We observed that conservatives like Bloom claim the multiculturalist movement responsible for the kind of decline they observe in the Western culture. Bloom argues that the present situation has emerged as the nature of the fragile balance between majority and minorities in the Constitution. He points out that the Founders had no hope for suppressing factions and educating a united or homogeneous citizenry. Instead, "they constructed an elaborate machinery to contain factions in such a way that they would cancel one another and allow for the pursuit of the common good" (Bloom, 1995:12). While it was hoped that through achieving a national majority that respects fundamental rights and refrain from using its power to overturn those rights the balance between majority and minority would sustain, by the disappearance of the common good, the delicate balance has faded away(Ibid:12).

Therefore, Bloom calls for a return to reason. Alongside with Plato, he argues, "[n]ature should be the standard by which we judge our lives and the lives of people. That is why philosophy, not history or anthropology, is the most important human science" (Ibid: 16-17). What has happened in contemporary American academy, however, is that "the need to know nature in order to have a standard is comfortably buried beneath our human science" (Ibid: 16). He concludes:

The United States is one of the highest and most extreme achievements of rational quest for the good life according to nature. What makes its political structure possible is the use of the rational principles of natural right to found a people, thus uniting the good with one's own. Or, to put it otherwise, the regime established here promised untrammeled freedom to reason_ not to everything indiscriminately, but to reason, the essential freedom that justifies the other freedoms, and on the basis of which, much deviance is also tolerated. An openness that denies the special claim of reason bursts the mainspring keeping the mechanism of this regime in motion (Ibid:17).

It is not hard to see that *the* rational life as conceived by conservative thinkers enjoy superiority over other ways of life. The conservative account of rationality is inherited from the Enlightenment: divorced from context and indifferent towards cultural particularities, in sum, a *view from nowhere*.

For the appeal which the Western way of life makes to such rationality, conservatives believe, it enjoys superiority over other (irrational) cultures.

The Liberal Perspective

With respect to the existing diversity among liberal theorists over the precise definition and contents of liberalism, it would be little exaggeration to say that the study of the history of the tradition reveals as many accounts of liberalism as liberal theories themselves. It is not to say, however, that these different accounts of liberalism have nothing in common. There are some features of liberalism, which can be recognised as shared among these accounts. I believe that most liberal thinkers would readily view liberalism as an individualist, egalitarian and universalistic tradition. These shared concepts are significantly related to my concern here. We need to say a little more about these concepts here.

Individualism can be viewed as one of the most characteristic concepts of liberalism. Just as those engaged in the Enlightenment project were confident that man is fully capable of deducing the worlds regularities and fundamental principles and thus able to predict its future in the manner of scientific discovery, and like the empiricist mode in natural science fashionable at the time, liberals have been concerned, though to different extents, with principles which explain the relation of man and society, on the basis of which, rules and restraints that are justified to the people who are to live under them. As Waldron puts it, [l]ike his empiricist counterparts in science, the liberal insists that intelligible justifications in social and political life must be available in principle for everyone, for society is to be understood by the individual mind, not by the tradition or sense of community (Waldron, 1993:126). For liberals, therefore, a social and political order is illegitimate unless it is rooted in the consent of all those who have to live under it; the consent or agreement of these people is a condition of its being morally permissible to enforce that order against them(Ibid:140). As a result, liberalism stresses the primacy of individual persons against any form of collectivity.

Secondly, and relatedly, liberalism can also be characterised as egalitarian. This should be understood in connection with its commitment to individualism: all men possess the same moral status as members of the political society. The notion of equality is so central to liberalism that liberal

thinkers like Ronald Dworkin suggest that all basic liberties (like freedoms of speech, association, conscience) are derived from the fundamental liberal commitment to the equality of concern and respect (Dworkin, 1985:192).

The third fundamental element of liberalism, which at the same time is connected to the first two, is that it is universalistic. As Gray puts it, the liberal conception of man and society should be understood in terms of affirming the moral unity of the human species and according a secondary importance to specific historic associations and cultural forms (Gray, 1986: x). Consequently, until very recently, all liberal theories were meant to provide rational frameworks applicable not to certain societies in the West but to the human society as such.

All these common features are explicitly or implicitly related to the problem of cultural diversity. As will be observed, for autonomy-based liberalism like that of Raz or Kymlicka, for example, the freedom of individuals enjoys such a priority over other values that all other goods come secondary to it. So far as universality of the liberal politics is concerned, the criticism levelled at the flaws which are associated with the liberal conception of the individual, has forced thinkers like John Rawls (1993) to revise their works in order to work out their conception of the person as a free and equal citizen, which forms the public culture of democratic societies. This has led to a change in methodology: liberal political theory is now concerned with what is viewed as a common political ground that can alone satisfy the demands of the public reason of democratic societies in the West (on this see Mulhall and Swift, 1996, Ch. 6).

Despite the principles which constitute such an assumed common culture are conceived by liberal theorists as neutral towards different conceptions of the good and, therefore, as universally adopted by all American citizens, as will be discussed below, a significant number of such principles are based on concepts which are culturally specific. The distinction that liberalism draws between the political and non-political, for instance, is itself concerned with a particular notion of privacy. Larry Peterman (1993) offers a clear discussion about the idea of privacy and its root in the history of the West. He rightly mentions that the subject has rarely been paid the attention it deserves: a fact, which indicates that the high valuation of privacy is usually taken for granted. Privacy has been considered as a sphere which should be protected from unwanted interference by others, including

political authorities. Through a critical analysis of works of authors like Hannah Arendt, Peterman shows that the source of conceptions of the private versus the public is neither the ancient Greek nor the Roman cultures. Rather, Christianity has brought about the changes in Western thought on this subject. The contemporary understanding of privacy originates from the New Testament and early Christianity since charity, which is characteristically distinguishable from private love, became the critical virtue in the Christian order. It was from then, Peterman argues, that these arose the notion of a private life lived apart from political life, as a consequence of the loving spirit and of virtues which are not subject to the public law (Peterman,1993:112). Liberalism has inherited this notion of privacy which is central to the value, which it attributes to the individual, and its high valuation of individual's domain.

There are two other conceptions at the heart of liberalism: the way religion is perceived, and partly as a consequence of this, the conception of the political which is viewed as secular. It is about the former which I would like to explain a little more here, though very briefly. When reading about religion and religious doctrine in works of liberal theorists, it is important to bear in mind that the conception of religion to which references are made is not religion *qua* religion, but a particular conception which is based firmly on Christianity as experienced in the West. It is important because while religion is addressed in general, the characteristics which are offered and the historical evidence which is employed match Christianity and not any other known religion. Cultural communities which are based on religions other than Christianity may not, therefore, agree on arguments related to this matter proposed by liberals. Although it has been mentioned before, it would be helpful to point out in what way the Christian connection of liberalism makes its political ideas connected to a particular culture. An interesting article by Larry Siedentop shows how and in what sense liberalism has inherited its fundamental conceptions from Christianity .He argues that when Western scholars describe contemporary Western societies as secular and materialistic, they miss the fact that Western distinctions between the state and civil society, and between the public and private spheres, are themselves derived from Christian assumptions: That is, they rest on a framework of assumptions and valuations which can be described broadly as individualist and which historically conform in crucial respects to

the framework of Christian theology. (Siedentop, 1989:308) While religion is no longer paramount in the West, and philosophy and moral doctrines have occupied most of its place, for other cultures religion may still provide the core of belief and provides the constituents of personal identity, the crucial source of social integration, and the key to the nature of things(Ibid: 308). By contrast, the predominant view is that the political and social vocabulary of the West apparently makes it possible to devalue beliefs as the source of social order by way of its distinctions between the public and private spheres, the state and civil society, ritual and truly moral action. (Ibid: 308) However, Siedentop remarks, this interpretation fail to see how deeply such distinctions are related with Christian assumptions. It fails to realise, for instance, that the birth of the individual in the West was a Christian achievement. He concludes that Christian ontology is the foundation of what are usually described as liberal values in the West (Ibid: 308).

Having discussed the common features of liberalism, we may now turn to the exploration and evaluation of its position towards cultural diversity. For the purpose of my argument, I have chosen Joseph Raz's and Will Kymlicka's discussions as they both have had attempted to accommodate cultural diversity within their liberal theories.

In an interesting article, Raz (1994) has offered a liberal perspective on multiculturalism. Since multiculturalism is a problem today and is likely to be so for the foreseeable future, for politics and the ethics of politics. He intends to explore the implications of the liberal political philosophy in which he believes. The contextuality of political theory, he argues, presupposes value pluralism and in this respect, contemporary liberalism differs from its classical ancestor. As a result, unlike the classical theories of Locke and Kant, contemporary liberal theory acknowledges the importance of community for individual well-being. In this respect, liberal nondiscriminatory theories of rights and discussions which concern the minority rights against majority rule fall too short in capturing the central claims of multiculturalism. Raz believes that:

[M]ulticulturalism emphasizes the importance to political action of two evaluative judgments. First, the belief that individual freedom and prosperity depend on full and unimpeded membership in a respected and flourishing cultural group. Second, a belief in value pluralism, and in

particular in the validity of the diverse values embodied in the practices of different societies (Raz, 1994: 69).

This, of course, is a liberal perspective, a perspective which emphasises the value of freedom to the individual in his being in charge of his life. For Raz, this freedom depends on options. By culture he means shared meanings and common practices (Ibid: 70). Cultural membership, therefore, is viewed as vitally importance to individuals in three ways: First, [o]nly through being socialized in a culture can one tap the options that give life a meaning(Ibid:71). Second, is the fact that a common culture facilitates relations and is a condition of rich and comprehensive personal relationship. (Ibid:71) Finally, cultural membership affects individual well-being. Raz concludes that it is only by referring to such an individualistic account of cultural membership that liberals can support multiculturalism:

Cultural, and other, groups have a life of their own. But their moral claim to respect and to prosperity rests entirely on their importance to the prosperity of individual human beings. This case is a liberal case for it emphasizes culture as a factor that gives shape and content to individual freedom (Ibid: 72).

He emphasizes here that liberal multiculturalism is characteristically non-utopian and that it rejects any commitment to perfectionism and conservatism. It rather sees the conflict between and within cultures as endemic.

Raz tries next to provide an argument to answer why cultures should be respected. He first notices that the liberal justification of multiculturalism is humanistic, not theological. Secondly, the liberal support for non-liberal cultures is conditional: it does so while imposing liberal protections for individual freedom on those cultures (Ibid: 74). Therefore, liberal multiculturalism recognizes and respects those cultures only to the extent that they serve true values. (Ibid: 74) A third point is that one's devotion to and love of ones 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 (Ibid:75).

I begin my criticism from the three points just mentioned and then I shall argue why I think his liberal multiculturalism is actually far from being compatible with the main claims of the recognition of cultural diversity. It should be pointed out at the outset that his claim that the liberal justification

of multiculturalism is humanistic rather than theological could not imply any rational superiority of the former over the latter, if it is meant to. As will be discussed in section 3, different traditions of moral enquiry presuppose different rationality and, considering the fact of untranslatability and incommensurability of cultures, at least sometimes it is impossible to claim one as rationally superior.

Secondly, he gives liberalism the power to decide whether a culture can be allowed to be respected in the multicultural society and the power to impose a particular conception of individual freedom on other cultures. This, as argued above, conflicts with the main claim of multiculturalism, namely, the equal recognition of diverse cultures. Since the true values, which Raz mentioned in this respect, turn out to be liberal, his multiculturalism turns out to be too narrow to embrace many non-liberal cultures.

Thirdly, his remark on the relation between ones affection for his culture seems to be unrealistic: how am I to love my culture while I do not regard it as better than others? And on what basis should I make up my mind to choose a culture (as the consequence of the freedom of choice that Raz's liberal multiculturalism provides me) when my choice is not (at least in my eyes) the better?

But apart from these points, his liberal formulation suffers from a deeper problem. Raz's reason for the compatibility of liberalism and multiculturalism is that autonomy (in terms of liberty of individual choice), which should be considered as the most fundamental value of liberalism, calls for the toleration of different cultures with the exception of those in which internal oppression is observed. Such a group is excluded from the suggested mutual toleration since the autonomy of its members is undermined. Oppression, however, can be defined differently from the viewpoints of different cultures and the cultural dependence of this factor undermines the very possibility of the application of Raz's solution. Here, the *Satanic Verses* affair in Britain provides a good example in this respect. On the one hand, the British Muslim community demanded that the book be banned, since in accordance with the Islamic law it was considered as blasphemous. On the other hand, liberals considered the ban as unacceptable since it would undermine freedom of speech. Raz's formulation, I suppose,

would vote for ignoring the Muslims demand on the ground that it would undermine the principle of autonomy (as interpreted by the liberal culture).

Andrew Mason has discussed this matter as follows: Raz believes that the thesis of his radical individualism is true in relation to an autonomy-supporting culture. But "[i]t is not clear whether this idea could justify giving priority to autonomy whenever it conflicts with community" (Mason, 1993: 236). Since the state of affairs which would then make the thesis of radical individualism true would be one in which priority has already been given to autonomy and the autonomous life by providing an environment that uniformly supports autonomous life-styles and discourages non-autonomous ones (Ibid: 236-237). Moreover, [w]ithin a society that provides an autonomy supporting environment, there may be groups which have traditions and customs that suppress autonomy. These groups may place their own meanings on the options that are provided by the dominant culture (Ibid: 237). Mason concludes that the truth involved in radical individualism is insufficient to justify giving priority to autonomy whenever it conflicts with community. A person, therefore, can lead a life that is autonomous to a large extent, even when some options are ruled out for him because allowing individuals to choose them would threaten to undermine communal relations. Someone who is prevented from ridiculing a religion that other members of the same community practice need not be prevented from leading a life that is autonomous in its broad outlines. Thus, even if radical individualism is true, it does not provide sufficient reason always to trade off threats to community in favor of protecting and promoting the exercise of autonomy (Ibid: 238-239).

Therefore, when it comes to non-liberal cultures, the liberal multiculturalism of Raz would tend to use assimilatory means rather than recognizing the existing cultural diversity. Two conclusions can be drawn from this argument. The first is that Raz's liberal approach is incompatible with multiculturalism. The second is that, considering the untranslatability and incommensurability of cultures, there cannot be any universally acceptable approach at all.

As mentioned above, Kymlicka too attempts to provide an account of liberalism as a political philosophy which can accommodate cultural diversity. Such a discussion should answer questions concerning the idea of

cultural membership and its nature, the meaning and extent of individual's cultural identity, and the legitimacy of ensuring the continuation of cultures.

Kymlicka begins his discussion by underlining the importance of our essential interest in leading a good life. He then argues that there are two preconditions for the fulfilment of such an interest: that we lead our lives from within; and that we should be free to question and revise our beliefs about what gives value to life. Together, they represent the basis of liberal political theory. Each theory, therefore, must give an account of what peoples interests are, most comprehensively conceived, and an account of what follows from supposing that these interests matter equally:

According to liberalism, since our most essential interest is getting these beliefs right and acting on them, government treats people as equals, with equal concern and respect, by providing for each individual the liberties and resources needed to examine and act on these beliefs. This requirement forms the basis of contemporary liberal theories of justice (Kymlicka, 1989:13).

This freedom to examine our ends from 'inside' is only valuable if we can pursue them, but it is not equivalent to the freedom to lead our lives from the inside (Ibid:19). It is this moral capacity for revising our ends which is the cornerstone of Kymlicka's liberalism and on which he builds his strategy of defending contemporary liberal theory. In fact, as we will see later, Kymlicka aims to show us that this power of revisability is unique to liberalism or at least that liberal theories have a stronger position on this matter than their communitarian rivals.

Yet he does not agree with Raz that appealing to perfectionist ideals is unavoidable. Kymlicka argues that while Raz claims that the necessity of public support for the cultural structure requires some controversial public ranking of the intrinsic merits of competing conceptions of the good; his argument relies on the non-controversial value of a secure cultural pluralism for people in developing their varying conceptions of the good. Therefore, there is no reason to suppose that governments cannot develop a decision procedure for public support of the culture of freedom that respected the principle of neutral concern (Ibid: 181).

What kind of neutrality and perfectionism, then, does he suggest? Kymlicka's commitment to state neutrality leads him to adopt an indirect perfectionism which argues that although the state should be neutral towards

different conceptions of the good, it should ensure the sort of freedom which is needed in choosing ones conception of life and revising that conception at any time. Interestingly, Ronald Dworkin has made the same suggestion in his paper, 'Can a Liberal State Support Art?' (Dworkin, 1989:11). While in his other works he has argued that the liberal state should be neutral in operation as between its citizens views about what kinds of life are valuable for themselves, when he is dealing with the issue whether the state can support the arts, his argument seems to violate such a neutrality of operation since here, Dworkin argues that the state is responsible for the culture within which people make their choices (Dworkin, 1990:308). For him, culture has two distinguishable consequences for citizens. First, it provides the particular cultural products; and second, it provides what he calls the structural aspect of the general culture, i.e. the frame that makes aesthetic values of that sort possible (Ibid: 229). The protection of cultural structures, however, is not involved in forcing anyone to make particular choices within it.

As Mulhall and Swift point out, however, it is far from clear that the value-neutral interpretation of cultural richness is what Dworkin has in mind, since his formulation of the argument explicitly suggests that the background culture should contain those opportunities and examples that have been thought to be part of living well by reflective people in the past and this implies that he cannot define what he means by a rich and diverse culture without invoking past judgment about the worth of specific cultural products. If so, then he cannot even specify his avowed aim without implicitly endorsing evaluations of a kind concerning which he appears to claim neutrality (Mulhall and Swift, 1996:303).

It should be pointed out that Kymlicka's argument for the neutrality of the liberal state is open to the same criticism since, as will be observed later, in his early works his approach to accommodating cultural diversity within liberalism appeals to this Dworkinian argument about cultural structure, though he ceases to employ it in his later writings as he realizes the difficulties it faces.

Secondly, his indirect perfectionism seems to be inconsistent with his idea of revisablity. As will be shown shortly, he argues that the value of revising ones beliefs about the good is instrumental, deriving from its role in helping one live a life that is on other grounds good. As Thomas Hurka

points out, revision has this value only when it will have this particular effect. If I have false or inadequate beliefs about the good, and revision would lead me to replace them with true beliefs, I have an interest in revision. It may switch me from less good activities to ones that are better. But if my current beliefs about the good are true, and revision would replace them with false beliefs, revision would do me harm. Thus, "[i]f in these circumstances the state discourages me from revising my beliefs, either coercively or non-coercively, it does me good" (Hurka, 1995:52). However, since Kellick does not endorse state perfectionism but defends state neutrality, his abstraction from particular claims about value leads him to suggest that revision in general is good, rather than only revision towards, and not away from, true beliefs. In addition, it invites the simple worry that a state may have false beliefs (Ibid).

Thirdly, the kind of neutrality that Kymlicka suggests seems to be similar to what has been called by B. Parekh (1994) cultural laissez-faire which extends the liberal principle of choice and competition to the realm of culture since he has argued that,

Liberal neutrality … allow[s] each group to pursue and advertise its way of life, and those ways of life that are unworthy will have difficulty attracting adherents. Since individuals are free to choose between competing visions of the good life, liberal neutrality creates a marketplace of ideas, as it were, and how well a way of life does in this market depends on the kinds of goods it can offer to prospective adherents. (Kymlicka, 1991:219)

Simon Caney has pointed out, however, that [t]he chief problem with this argument lies in the assumption that valuable forms when confronted with worthless forms will prevail while we have no reason to think that the most valuable ideals always triumph, and that truth defeats falsity (Caney, 1991:460).

However, Kymlicka is aware of some difficulties which the cultural marketplace argument for neutrality may produce. Such worries are explicitly shown where he points out that [m]inority cultures are often vulnerable to economic, cultural, and political pressure from the larger society (Kymlicka,1994: 24), which indicates that some groups may be unfairly disadvantaged in the cultural marketplace.

I think that the most important problem of Kymlicka's argument for the state neutrality lies somewhere else. When discussing cultural differences he is only concerned with cultural minorities.

Although he insists that [m]embership in a culture is qualitatively different from membership in other associations, since our language and culture provide the context within which we make our choices and that [l]oss of cultural membership... is a profound harm that reduces ones very ability to make meaningful choices (Ibid: 25), he fails to see that there are a significant number of cultural communities which cannot be considered as minorities. For instance, it is hard to see how his approach can possibly deal with the cultural differences, which have been emphasized by feminists.

A possible response can be that Kymlicka's approach is at least applicable to minorities. However, for at least one reason, his approach faces difficulty even when concerned with cultural minorities, that is, what Kymlicka fails to see is that the very nature of cultural identity makes the accommodation of cultural diversity as a certain kind of minority rights very difficult, if not impossible.

The reason lies in the extent to which such differences may touch our understanding of politics itself. There are cultural communities (minority or not), for instance, which do not agree with the public-private distinction as liberals view it. For this very reason, his neutrality of concern which he views as the most likely political principle to secure public assent in societies like ours (Kymlicka, 1989:95), turns to be not as neutral as it seems at first, because the criterion by which the state policies would be judged as neutral or otherwise is grounded on an account of autonomy-based freedom of choice for citizens which is by its very nature liberal. Such a liberal account may come into conflict with other accounts of individual freedom and autonomy held by other cultures which live within western democracies and, therefore, he needs to show the liberal account as superior, a task which itself can lead to further difficulties.

Different Cultures, Different Rationality

As mentioned in the introduction, I believe that from a philosophical point of view, the nature of differences of cultures is understood more adequately if they are seen as traditions of moral enquiry. Alasdair MacIntyre has

introduced this perspective, and the discussion of this section will be mainly concerned with exploring its contents.

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

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

A living tradition then is a historically extended, socially embodied argument and an argument precisely in part about the goods which constitute the tradition. Within a tradition the pursuit of goods extends through generations, sometimes through many generations (MacIntyre, 1985:272).

In *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* MacIntyre's approach to the conception of a tradition aims to answer an important question one confronts at the end of *After Virtue*: "How ought we to decide among the claims of rival and incompatible accounts of justice competing for our moral, social, and political allegiance?"(MacIntyre, 1988:2).

Although to a limited extent, *After Virtue* makes it clear that instead of the view which dominated philosophical discourse at the time, there is not one line of moral enquiry which has derived and changed throughout the history of philosophy, but rival traditions, each consisting of a conception of the good for the pursuit of which that particular tradition is constituted. An immediate question, therefore, concerns the judgment we have to make in order to choose one rather than another. Here, MacIntyre introduces a more comprehensive version of the concept. He argues that traditions of thought differ from each other not only in the conceptions of the good which they hold, but in their account of what rationality is. Such a claim about rival

accounts of rationality undermines fundamentally a possible answer to the above question according to which judgments among rival traditions should be made by appealing to the laws of logic.

Accordingly, one tradition may be found logically superior to others. But as MacIntyre notices, observance of the law of logic is only a necessary and not a sufficient condition for theoretical or practical rationality: "It is on what has to be added to observance of the laws of logic to justify ascriptions of rationality- whether to oneself or to others, whether to modes of enquiry or to justifications of belief, or to courses of action and their justification- that disagreement arises concerning the fundamental nature of rationality and extends into disagreement over how it is rationally appropriate to proceed in the face of these disagreements"(Ibid:2). The conception of tradition, therefore, is now to be understood in a wider sense.

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

This can be better understood through understanding what MacIntyre calls 'Epistemological Crisis'. To share a culture is to share schemata which are at one and the same time constitutive and normative for intelligible action by one and are also means for his or her interpretations of other actions. Consider now that someone who has been away from his home for a long time returns and finds that his people have changed in his absence. There will arise problems, in that the narrative of his family and of the society he lives in, through which he had identified his own place in society and his relationship to others, has been disrupted by radical interpretative doubts. He finds himself, therefore, in an epistemological crisis. An epistemological crisis, thus, is always a crisis in human relationships. Similarly, "[w]hen an epistemological crisis is resolved, it is by the construction of a new narrative which enables the agents to understand both how he or she could intelligibly have held his or her original beliefs and how he or she could have been drastically misled by them" (MacIntyre, 1977:455).

The agent, however, has to accept two points: first, that these new forms of understanding may themselves in turn come to be put in question; and

secondly, that since in such crisis the criticism of truth, intelligibility and rationality may be put in question, "we are never in the position to claim that now we possess the truth or now we are fully rational" (Ibid:455). However, how does such a progress towards a better narrative begin? According to MacIntyre, one sign that shows that a tradition is in crisis is that "its accustomed ways for relating *seems* and *is* begins to break down" and, consequently, "the pressures of scepticism becomes more urgent and attempts to do the impossible, to refute scepticism once and for all, becomes projects of central importance to the culture and not mere private academic enterprises" (Ibid:459). But why has the role of narrative been ignored so widely within philosophical discourse? It is because tradition has usually been taken seriously only by conservative social theorists and such theorists have never attended to the connection between tradition and narrative. What constitutes a tradition is a conflict of interpretations of that tradition and this is in contrast to the conception of tradition as a resolution to rational conflicts for which traditions are used within conservative theories. Thus all kinds of traditions (religious, political and intellectual) involve epistemological debates as a necessary feature of their conflicts. Moreover, "it is not merely that different participants in a tradition disagree; they also disagree as to how to characterize their disagreements and as to how to resolve them. They disagree as to what constitutes appropriate reasoning, decisive evidence, and conclusive proof" (Ibid, 461).

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

So, it was hoped, reason would displace authority and tradition. Rational justification was to appeal to principles undeniable by any rational person and therefore independent of all those social and cultural particularities which the Enlightenment thinkers took to be the mere accidental clothing of reason in particular times and places (MacIntyre, 1988:6).

The liberal tradition which has dominated moral and political philosophy since then has taken a similar task. A discussion which had not been advanced by MacIntyre until the publication of *Whose Justice? Which*

Rationality? Is that instead of discovering an epistemological ground which is neutral in relation to all the discussions of other traditions and hence able to claim a kind of superiority over rival modes of moral enquiry, liberalism has itself been transformed into a tradition. The liberal claim (at least in its Kantian form) was initially to provide a political, legal and economic framework in which those who hold different and incompatible conceptions of the good life would be able to appeal to neutral standards so they could live altogether in peace: "Every individual is to be equally free to propose and to live by whatever conception of the good he or she pleases, derived from whatever theory or tradition he or she may adhere to, unless that conception of the good involves reshaping the life of the rest of the community in accordance with it" (Ibid:336). In the public realm, only the expression of preference is permitted, either as an individual or a group, and it is here that the market-based idea of liberalism can be easily observed: whether a particular preference is chosen as the basis of policy-making is a matter for bargaining. It is on the basis of such an idea that central features of the liberal system of evaluation become comprehensible: the principle of neutrality requires that the liberal be committed to there being no one overriding good. What follows from this is that life is compartmentalized into different spheres and, therefore, each individual pursues his or her good within different and distinct groups. The liberal self, then, is one that moves from sphere to sphere, compartmentalising its attitudes. The claims of any one sphere to attention or to resources are once again to be determined by the summing of individual preferences and by bargaining:

So it is important for all areas of human life and not only for explicitly political and economic transactions that there should be acceptable rules of bargaining. And what each individual and each group has to hope for from these rules is that they should be such as to enable that individual or that group to be as effective as possible in implementing his, her, or their preferences. This kind of effectiveness thus becomes a central value of liberal modernity (Ibid, 337).

The implementation of preferences and desires, however, is not peculiar to liberalism. What makes it distinguishable is that first-person expressions of desires have been transformed into statements of reason for action, i.e., into premises for practical reasoning. MacIntyre argues that such a transformation "is brought about by a restructuring of thought and action in

a way which accords with the procedures of the public realms of the market and of liberal individualist politics" (Ibid: 339).

According to MacIntyre, the culture of liberalism transforms expressions of opinion into what its political and moral theory had already said that they were, i.e., the deference of rival moral and political standpoints is interpreted within the liberal order as the expression of preferences. Whereas liberalism initially rejected the claims of any overriding theory of the good, in fact it embodies just such a theory because "[t]he starting points of liberal theorizing are never neutral as between conceptions of the human good; they are always liberal starting points"(Ibid: 345).

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

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

Here, MacIntyre distinguishes between the kind of evaluation with which we are engaged in the comparison of rival and competing claims within one and the same tradition and that of evaluating similar claims when each has developed within two very different and competing traditions. In the first type, what is available is a set of relatively unproblematic standards to which we appeal in making such a comparison. But in the latter, there are accounts of practical reasoning which are developed within very different conceptual frameworks.

Here we confront the problem of incommensurability and untranslatability which runs against the very central claim of cosmopolitan modernity which believes that all cultural phenomena must be capable of being translated into the language which the adherents of modernity speak to each other. Moreover, broadly speaking, there are no neutral tradition-independent standards of a rationally justifiable kind to which we can appeal in such evaluative comparison.

That is not to say that no independent and neutral standard can be found at all. Rather, what MacIntyre points out is that any attempt to identify some

ground for justice independent of the competing traditions requires some feature or features of human moral stance which hold(s) of human beings independently of and apart from "those characteristics which belong to them as members of any particular society or cultural tradition. In doing so, the difficulty which arises is that those conceptions of universality and impersonality which survive this kind of abstraction from the concreteness of traditional or even nontraditional conventional modes of moral thought and action are far too thin and meager to supply what is needed" (Ibid, 334). MacIntyre's position, therefore, is different from an absolute relativist one, since he does not reject the possibility of finding universality altogether. What he believes is that by appealing to such universality, we cannot go far enough in establishing those grounds we are searching for.

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

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

We observed what a conception of tradition for MacIntyre is, and we saw how traditions of moral enquiry are related to each other. In this section I am going to explore the notion of culture in MacIntyre's thought. In particular I am interested in the relationship between cultures and traditions. My thesis is that the problem of the politics of cultural diversity is best formulated if cultures, or, to be more precise, those features of cultures which are of political significance in respect to the problem of cultural diversity, can be conceived as traditions of moral enquiry. That is to say, as far as the political decision-making process is concerned, the differences between cultural communities are not to be understood as difference between cultures as such, but between cultures as the contexts and resources of traditions of moral enquiry.

We need first to explain the concept of culture as perceived by MacIntyre. In order to do so, we may use his discussion on the five characteristics of the conception of morality in the culture of the Ninth Edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannia*, of which Adam Gilford was a prominent member. The first is that in that culture, morality was a distinct and relatively autonomous area of beliefs ordered with a scheme of rigid compartmentalisation of life. The moral, therefore, was sharply distinct from the economic, the religious, the legal, and the like. Secondly, morality was primarily a matter of rule-following and ritualised responses to breaches of rules. Thirdly, these rules were chiefly negative prohibitions. Fourthly, it was a culture in which "strong notions of impropriety attached to violations of the compartmentalizing boundaries of social life. To know what conversation, what manners, what clothing was appropriate and proper to whom, where, and when was indispensable social and moral knowledge"(MacIntyre, 1990:26). Fifthly, social agreement, especially in practice and on what morality was and what it consists of, coexisted with intellectual disagreements on the nature of its rational justifications. MacIntyre concludes that moral philosophies always articulate the morality of some particular social and cultural standpoints.

This dependence of morality and moral philosophy is in important parts derived from the role of characters. For MacIntyre, characters are "a very special type of social role which places a certain kind of moral constraint on the personality of those who inhabit them in a way in which many other social roles do not" because "[t]hey furnish recognizable characters and the ability to recognize them is socially crucial because a knowledge of the character provides an interpretation of the actions of those individuals who have assumed the character" (MacIntyre, 1985:27). A character is "an object of regard by the members of the culture generally or by some significant segment of them" (Ibid:28). Characters, therefore, are certain kinds of social role specific to particular cultures. Thus:

One of the key differences between cultures is the extent to which roles are characters; but what is specific to each culture is in large and central part what is specific to its stock of characters. So the culture of Victorian England was partially defined by the characters of the Public School Headmaster, the Explorer and the Engineer; and that of Wilhelmine

Germany was similarly defined by such characters as those of the Prussian Officer, the Professor and the Social Democrat (Ibid: 28).

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

It is on the basis of such an understanding that he criticises the form of existing universities and suggests that universities should be places "where conceptions of and standards of rational justification are elaborated, put to work in the detailed practices of enquiry, and themselves rationally evaluated, so that only from the university can the wider society learn how to conduct its own debates, practical or theoretical, in a rationally defensible way" (MacIntyre, 1990:222).

This, of course, requires fundamental changes in universities because "that claim itself can be plausibly and justifiably advanced only when and insofar as the university is a place where rival and antagonistic views of rational justification, such as those of genealogists and Thomists, are afforded the opportunity both to develop their own enquiries, in practice and in the articulation of the theory of that practice, and to conduct their intellectual and moral warfare" (Ibid: 222).

Different cultures, therefore, pursue the realization of different traditions of moral enquiries which in turn rely on different rationalities. The important point to be drawn here is that viewed as such, no culture can claim superiority over others as being, for instance, more rational. There are significant implications of this point that lead us to a critical re-evaluation of the concept of the modern state, its nature and its functions. I shall discuss this implication below, though very briefly.

The Concept of Culture and its Political Implications

As mentioned above, in discussing cultural diversity, it seems crucial to note that what raised to the emerging significance of the argument during recent decades is rather due to the increasing demands for the 'recognition' of such

diversity than the mere affirmation of its 'existence' which by no means is specific to contemporary societies but as old as human social life. Let's have a closer look at the main concepts involved in the concerned discussion:

- Culture: Rather than the narrowly defined anthropological notion, in the realm of studying cultural diversity, culture is generally understood both as the spiritual and material characteristics of a society or social group which in addition to literature and arts, includes lifestyle, value system, and customs and believes(UNESCO, 2001). Philosophically speaking, it may be suggested, culture represents a framework within which, conceptions of the good life held by individual persons or a community are formed.
- Cultural pluralism: There are two views on pluralism in general and cultural pluralism in particular. According to the first account, it is as an irreducible and permanent feature of almost all contemporary societies. The kind of plurality at stake may include either different understandings of a certain conception of the good life held within a specific community, or the diversity of conceptions of the good held in different societies. Accordingly, the recognition of such a plurality in the processes of decision-making is necessary in democratic societies. To put it differently, while in the democratic theory, justice in the public sphere was traditionally viewed as a matter of equality (as opposed to inequality), from a postmodern perspective, it is seen through the discourse of difference (as opposed to assimilation). In fact, in plural societies, it is the very concept of equality which is pluralized (Requejo, 2005: 10). On the other hand, the second view holds cultural diversity as not only a fact, but also a value that should be protected against any attempt involving assimilation. The value of the plurality of conceptions of the good life lies in providing a wide range of options to be chosen by citizens as an essential precondition of exercising their individual freedom.
- Identity: There are different accounts of the concept of 'identity'. I do not intend to argue the complicated and controversial sociological aspects and philosophical claims here, but to note only two of the major trends on notion of identity: the first may be described as foundational as it views identity as representing one's inherent characteristics that determine his or her moral orientation as a rational animal. This account

is universalistic by nature and takes the person's identity as more or less unchangeable. The second account is contextual and understand identity in relational terms, underlying the importance of the individual and society. Accordingly, the person's self-awareness towards his or her belonging to a social group and, at the same time, his or her independence as an individual, plays a significant role in the formation of his multiple and hybrid identity.

- Cultural diversity and policy-making: Depending on the way they comprehend cultural identity, political theories which view cultural diversity at least as an undeniable reality and permanent feature of human social life, adopt different approaches in accommodating the issue into state policies; namely the minimalist and the maximalist ones. Minimalist views hold that in democratic governments, policies should be formed in accordance with the principle of tolerance with respect to cultural differences. Maximalist views, on the other hand, go further to demand decision-making processes to include considerations concerning cultural diversity. In the latter, therefore, the cultural toleration of minorities by the majority is seen as a necessary but not sufficient condition. Accordingly, all decisions should be made with respect to the plurality of ways of life, beliefs and values.
- Cultural community: Theories of the politics of cultural diversity are either individualistic (as in the Kantian liberal view), collectivistic (as in the socialist pluralist view), or based on the intertwined significance of the individual and society (as in the communitarian view). For those theories which attribute cultural identity to cultural membership of a certain cultural group or community, the role of cultural communities in political policy making is quite important. Accordingly, governments which facilitate the participation of cultural communities in state politics are considered as more democratic in comparison with those which ignore cultural differences.
- Practical reasoning: With respect to practical reasoning in democracies, two types of rationality are distinguishable. First, instrumental rationality which focuses on the most efficient or cost-effective means to achieve a specific end, but not in itself reflecting its value. The main characteristic of instrumental rationality in politics is its reliance on bargaining and compromise among different views; its values or guidelines are

efficiency and stability. According to this account, general agreements which are achieved through moral conventions but are unstable, are viewed as unacceptable. By contrast, one may call for a morally defended rationality which respects the diversity of values and beliefs and besides seeking the empowerment of national unity, provide the free and peaceful co-existence of different cultural communities within the framework of national solidarity.

- Neutrality of the state: until recently, one way of avoiding controversial value-based arguments involving policy-making, was to adopt a neutral position towards different conceptions of 'the good'. This could be understood as procedural neutrality, consequentialist neutrality, or generally speaking, any account of state decision making processes which is blind to the diversity of the conception of good life. Today, arguments for political neutrality, however, are seen as either impossible or undesirable. The question of finding a model of a political agreement compatible with the recognition of cultural diversity, therefore, remains at the heart of the contemporary political philosophy.

Furthermore, it is worth noting that adopting policies which ignore cultural diversity seems undesirable for at least four interrelated reasons:

a. The kind of national unity and integrity which is based on imposing assimilatory policies are formal rather than essential; and different historical instances prove its fragility and instability as soon as political conditions and power balance change. Demanding members of cultural communities to ignore the cultural differences which is derived from their shared history and common identities for the sake of national unity and solidarity, seems unrealistic and even though the state machinery can impose such policies through a variety of means (legislation, nationwide media, and distribution of resources), it would not end in creating a homogenized cultural identity. At best, it would give rise to hypocrisy, alienation, anger, depression and decrease in social capital.
b. The adoption of assimilatory policies would encourage diverging rather than converging tendencies among different cultural communities. A glance at historical experiences of different countries, including Iran, proves the point that diverging tendencies take most advantages from assimilatory policies of the central government to legitimize their claims in the eyes of the politically deprived members of cultural minorities.

c. In addition to practical disadvantages, adopting policies which are indifferent to cultural diversity, are morally unacceptable. By ignoring cultural minority's rights, they pave the way for the tyranny of the majority, the harmful effects of which have been argued widely under the subject of 'the wrongfulness of the tyranny of the majority rule'. To point out only one of its consequences, the burdens it imposes upon the realization of creativity among cultural communities, seems to be sufficient to see it as undesirable.
d. Today we live in a world in which protecting local identities against enormous waves of globalism becomes increasingly more difficult. Imposing assimilatory policies by national governments would facilitate wider and more effective influence of cultural globalization. The fact that worldwide media are usually welcomed by cultural minorities and centralized national broadcasting is losing its audients seems to be a sign of this developing tendency.

The recognition of cultural diversity in political decision-making processes, therefore, is now an important part of national governments' business, both from a moral point of view and for pursing national interests and security. My claim is that rethinking the traditional roles and functions of national government is a necessary step in this way; a point which will be argued in the next section.

Theories of national solidarity

Nation-state is a modern concept emerged from the ninetieth century, partly as a result of the Westphalian peace treaties of 1648, received privilege in public political language and academic debates as a concept which joins the political entity of a state to the cultural entity of a nation. Arguing for any other political alternative concept or any criticism concerning its functions and tasks, however, is usually seen at best as an unrealistic and utopian attempt by most politicians. Nevertheless, many contemporary political theorists have explored the disadvantages of the nation-state model. I am not going to discuss any of their arguments here, since my focus will be on the functions of national government with regard to cultural diversity. As an initial step, it may be useful to consider the controversial concept of 'nation'. We may agree with Scruton, that "a nation consists of a people, sharing a common language (or dialects of a common language), inhibiting

a fixed territory, with common customs and traditions, which may have become sufficiently conscious to take on the aspect of law, and who recognize common interests and common need for a single sovereign"(Scruton, 1982:312). Accordingly, a nation-state is "a state organized for the government of a nation (or perhaps of two or more closely related nations), whose territory is determined by national boundaries, and whose law is determined, at least in part, by national customs and expectations"(Ibid). In contemporary world, therefore, government is sovereignty over an independent territory and its conceptual requirements including population, the organization of this population such that it does not remain a mere aggregation of individuals, sovereignty of the collective will, and exclusive rule by this sovereign entity over a territory (Renner, 2005:24-25).

An important point about arguments on nationality is that from the modern political and moral point of view, to ascribe any moral value to nationalism seems problematic. Nationality is not by itself morally valuable and is unlikely to be a source of normative propositions which can be used as benchmarks in shaping political decision-making processes. One reason for viewing nationality as non-moral (not immoral) is that, with the exception of cases where the person asks for changing his/her nationality, no one is free to choose the membership of a certain nation, but is born with his/her national identity. Now if we conceive a moral action as an action which is based on one's autonomy, ascribing any moral value to nationality seems to be very difficult, if not impossible.

This is not the case for membership of cultural communities. The moral dimension of membership in a certain cultural community is articulated through affirming its significance in one's identity. As Iris Young puts it,

Attachment to specific traditions, practices, language, and other culturally specific forms is a crucial aspect of social existence. People do not usually give up their social group identifications, even when they are oppressed(Young, 1990: 163).

According to Charles Taylor, the main feature of human being is its dialogical characteristic and "we become full human agents, capable of understanding ourselves, and hence of defining an identity, through our acquisition of rich human language of expression"(Taylor, 1991:23). For

this reason, universal commitments (such as religious faith) and particularities (such as nationality) are parts of one's identity.

A more serious criticism on modern theories of national government concerns not the very notion of nation, but conceiving it as "one nation, one culture". This is the criticism made by Karl Renner (2005) through comparing contemporary ethnic conflicts and the religious wars at the outset of European modern history. At the time, German absolutist states imposed a certain religious attitude on their subjects in the aftermath of the Augsburg Settlement of 1555. The organizational principle was 'in this region, that religion' which resulted in endless wars and was resolved only through the separation of religion from the territorial sovereignty and the right of peaceful co-existence of the followers of different religious faith was recognized. In modern states, according to Renner (29), the organizational principle is 'in this region, that language' or 'who governs the territory decides the language. As Ephraim Nimmi points out, "the personality principle, according to Renner, would separate the question of governance from the issue of protecting national and cultural identities, just as religious freedom separated church from state"(Nimmi, 2005:11).

The aim, therefore, is not to reject authority over a certain territory by the national government, but to find an alternative for the myth of 'one-nation, one culture'; a myth which has encouraged many political theorists (among them some liberals) to allow the enforcement of assimilatory policies by appealing to the melting-pot metaphor. Today, however, national governments have to accept the undeniable realty of the existence of different cultural communities within their national borders. Instead of neglecting the reality, they need to think about the ways by which such diversity could accommodate to national solidarity. How such a paradoxical situation might be solved? The present study attempts to suggest a theoretical framework in accordance with which, appropriate procedures might be designed.

Cultural autonomy

As mentioned above, neglecting cultural diversity leads to ignore the problem rather than finding a solution. Todays, almost no state might claim cultural homogeneity. Various sources of cultural differences can be distinguished: some differences appear as the consequences of immigration,

other are concerned with distinct territorially concentrated groups, and there are demands for the political recognition of some linguistically or religiously particular communities. What distinguishes the second kind is their geographical concentration and their belonging to a particular territory, while the first and third kinds may be geographically scattered, however, connected by common beliefs (including religious) or other cultural features (such as language or rituals).

One way of dealing with such different kinds of cultural difference is to adopt a particular policy for each cultural minority. This is usually applied by most of liberal democracies and its advantages and disadvantages have been largely discussed by scholars like Will Kymlicka (1995), Bhikhu Parekh (2000), Paul Kelly (2002), Simon Caney (2002) and Susan Mendus (2002). The model I wish to use here, however, is 'cultural autonomy' in conjunction with a kind of an 'overlapping consensus'. I shall explore each briefly and then turn to discuss its application to the particular case of Iran.

'Cultural autonomy' was first suggested by Otto Bauer and Karl Renner (1899) as an efficient model for the new political conditions of the Austrian empire in the aftermath of defeat by Prussia which divided German and Hungarian populations in each part. Renner argued the model in his famous essay 'State and Nation' which recently, after the reappearance of ethnic wars of the post-soviet era, received wide attentions. The model rests on the 'personality principle' which is distinguished from the 'territory principle'. The former concerns the protection of national and cultural identities while the latter represents the very character of the modern state. Accordingly, every citizen is required to declare his/her nationality when he or she reaches the voting age. Thus, "members of each national community, whatever their territory of residence, would form a single public body or association endowed with a legal personality, collective rights, segmental sovereignty and competences to deal with all national cultural affairs in the context of a single multinational state"(Renner, 2005:11).

To deal with the overlapping consensus model, some preliminary notes need to be pointed out beforehand:

First, it should be noticed that, as Rawls (1993) rightly argued, there are important differences between an 'overlapping consensus' and a 'modus vivendi', the most significant of which is that the former is based on morally agreed principles and, therefore, enjoys stability over the time, whereas the

latter is always in danger of breakdown since a shift in the distribution of power would give a group an incentive to rewrite the terms of social contract so as to benefit itself (147).

Second, as I have discussed elsewhere (Hosseini Beheshti, 2007:13), we may distinguish two kinds of politics when multicultural societies are at hands: a kind of politics based on thick moral arguments about 'the good', which is relevant to the political relations *within* cultural societies; and the kind of politics which is concerned with the politics of cultural difference and is based on thin moral or even non-moral principles, appropriate for the political relations *between* cultural communities.

Finally, the model offered here should be viewed as a general framework and its applications are in need of further articulation. I claim, however, that it may work well in countries like Iran; the reasons of which will be explained bellow.

The model of an overlapping consensus of cultural communities might be outlined as follows:

- The concept of national integrity at stake is not understood so comprehensive to ignore differences. Rather, it represents a common ground which may be recognized by different cultural communities as a possible overlapping consensus. The recognition of difference in this way, does not end necessarily in the disintegration and collapse of the nation as a whole. As Young states, "Difference now comes to mean not otherness, exclusive opposition, but specificity, variation, heterogeneity. Difference names relations of similarity and dissimilarity that can be reduced to neither coextensive identity nor nonoverlapping otherness"(Young, 1990: 171). In Iran, I think, the shared Iranian-religious identity which has developed over the last twenty-five centuries, can be considered as capturing such a common ground. It is worth mentioning that the two components (the 'Iranian' and the 'religious') of this common identity go hands to hands and none may be reduce to the other. Muslims are the largest religious community in the country. However, it should be noticed that many of the religious rituals are more or less culturally localized without undermining the universalistic nature of Islamic beliefs. But a few peoples in the region enjoy such a historically constructed unifying identity and for most of them membership of either transnational communities (such as being

Arabs) or local communities is more recognizable than their national identity. The Iranian national identity can encompass most of the various sub-cultural identities like the Azaries, Kurds, Lors, Baluches and Arabs who live in different parts of the country but recognize themselves as Iranian and Muslims. Members of religious minorities such as Jews and Christians, the two Abrahamic religious traditions close to Islam, and Zoroastrians and many other religious minorities recognized themselves as religious Iranian too. The Iranian-religious identity, therefore, may be well recognized as a basis for the consensus.

- Governance in this model of autonomy is cultural identity-oriented rather than territory-based; a tradition experienced both in the ancient history of Iran and the prophet Mohammad in Medina in the 7th century. Moreover, the non-territorial-based cultural autonomy model reveals a more practically acceptable approach in the present conditions of cultural diversity in Iran. Today, as a result of changes emerged according to the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988) and the increasing rate of immigration from rural to urban areas, ethnic and religious communities are more shattered than before. The model would also reduce anxieties over the possible disintegration of the nation and the potential danger of segmentation of the country.
- The decentralization of the political power of the national government in favor of the empowerment of cultural communities is practicable in issues which are justified for political reasons compatible with the republican character of the political system, and for moral and humanistic reasons compatible with its Islamic character. It should be noticed, however, that the processes of such decentralization is gradual and, therefore, necessary legal structure and cultural grounds could be developed in the meantime. It would take place in verity of forms such as the transition of economic tenure to the public sphere, the distribution of national budget with regard to cultural demands, and increasing the public awareness on cultural diversity through the media, education system and arts.
- Since founded on national common interests and the respect for different cultural identities, the national solidarity achieved in this way would be more stable against possible foreign treats. Moreover, it helps to increase the social capital and hence, results in balanced and sustainable

development which in turn, would strengthened the national government authority in regional and international aspects.

Through the model just outlined, I think it would be possible to introduce a new way of peaceful co-existence between cultural diversity and national solidarity.

As mentioned earlier, however, it needs further studies in related areas such as a clearer articulation of cultural minorities' demands in order to show the contents and extents of such demands in more details; the review of policies, laws, and regulations as well as the actual functions of governmental offices with respect to national minorities; and the assessment of successes or failures of policies concerning cultural diversity experienced in other countries.

Conclusion

The arguments of the present study attempted to offer an understanding of politics of cultural diversity through references to the basic concepts and different theories suggested so far. It has been mentioned that the most important point is to go further than mere toleration against cultural minorities to the recognition of equal rights for such them in order to facilitate their inclusion in political decision-making processes. The most important question for national governments, therefore, is how to manage the coexistence of cultural diversity and national solidarity. In order to provide an answer to this question, I employed the notion of 'overlapping consensus' and the model of 'cultural autonomy' and suggested some elementary principles of a model which may be called an 'overlapping consensus of autonomous cultural communities' which I hope might facilitate solving the problem in an appropriate way.

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