The Subject of Multiculturalism:
Culture, Religion, Language, Ethnicity, Nationality, and Race?

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Contemporary political theory debates about multiculturalism largely take for granted that it is “culture” and “cultural groups” that are to be recognized and accommodated. Yet, the discussion tends to draw on a wide range of examples involving religion, language, ethnicity, nationality, and race. Culture is a notoriously overbroad concept, and all of these categories have been subsumed by or taken to be synonymous with the concept of culture. Consider some prominent examples.

In Charles Taylor’s account, culture is understood primarily in terms of language. Each language is taken to be the expression of the authentic identity of a Volk. The culture of Quebec, Taylor says, “means in practice the French language.” Beyond language, the ‘politics of recognition’ that Taylor explores in his seminal essay seems to encompass not only claims by ethnic and national minorities but also by women and racial minorities for the recognition of the equal worth of their collective identities. The attempts by American educators in the 1970s, 80s, and 90s to include the cultural contributions of Native Americans, African Americans, and Asian Americans in school curricula is one prominent example.

Will Kymlicka’s theory of multiculturalism defends special accommodations for ethnic minorities, but like Taylor, the focus of his theory is really on indigenous groups and minority nations, such as Quebec. In defending self-government rights on their behalf, he brings in examples of language rights. He argues for what he calls “polyethnic rights” for immigrants, but all of his “ethnic” examples are cases of religious exemption: Jews and Muslims in Britain who seek exemptions from Sunday closing and humane animal slaughter laws; Sikh men in Canada who seek exemptions from motorcycle helmet laws and official dress-codes of police forces; Orthodox Jewish men in the U.S. who seek the right to wear the yarmulke during military service; and Muslim girls in France who want to be exempted from school dress-codes so they can wear the headscarf. More recent contributions to the multiculturalism debate also draw on a wide array of examples, including female circumcision, polygamy, cultural defenses in criminal law, public funding for religious schools, religion-based family law, aboriginal membership rules, and affirmative action programs, without specifying in what sense these cases involving religion, language, ethnicity, nationality, or race are about “culture.”

This paper attempts to disaggregate the variety of claims typically associated with multiculturalism. Multiculturalism has been taken to be a key part of struggles for

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5 See Barry 2001; Benhabib 2002; Carens 2000; Gutmann 2003; Okin 1999; Parekh 2000; Shachar 2002.
religious, ethnic, and racial justice, and I want to see how the idea of culture figures in arguments for group-differentiated rights in the context of religion, language, ethnicity, nationality, and race. My aim is not to offer a classification of different types of “cultural rights” claims (e.g. exemptions, positive assistance, self-government rights, etc.), nor to offer normative assessments of the variety of arguments I consider. My aim is largely explanatory: I want to explore the different arguments offered for a range of multiculturalism claims from within liberal theory. I have organized my discussion by different types of groups (e.g. religious, linguistic, ethnic, racial) with the hope that this will make it easier to discern the similarities and differences in arguments associated with these different categories.

Disaggregating multiculturalism is important for at least two reasons. First, it will allow us to see what is really at stake in the “claims of culture” and “conflicts of culture.” In some cases, religion may be at the heart of these claims and conflicts; in other cases, they may arise from linguistic divisions. In still other cases, claims may arise out of a history of exclusion and marginalization with subordinated groups demanding not only material remedy but symbolic recognition of the cultural traditions that developed in resistance to subordination. All of these issues will be implicated for those at the intersection of multiple marginalized groups.

Making these distinctions can also help us think about how multiculturalism connects to the pursuit of equality more generally. Some have argued that multiculturalism, understood as a symbolic politics of recognition, is a distraction from the pursuit of equality, viewed as the material politics of redistribution. The suggestion here is that multiculturalism is really about valuing cultural diversity, not addressing economic inequality. I think the story is more complicated than this. Both redistribution and recognition are important dimensions in the pursuit of justice for racial, ethnic, and religious minorities. Recognition is important not only for the consequences it has on socioeconomic status and political participation, but also because it plays an important symbolic role in fostering the civic inclusion of marginalized groups. To explore the role of multiculturalism in the larger struggle for equality, we first need to distinguish among the variety of multicultural claims and consider the sorts of disadvantages they aim to address.

Religion

Much analysis of group rights and multiculturalism revolves around religious examples: religious exemptions from generally applicable laws, the recognition of traditional legal codes of religious communities, and self-government rights for territorially concentrated religious minorities. Indeed, the word “culture” tends to be used to encompass such claims, where “culture” is taken to mean the customs and way of life of a group of people. This tendency is understandable. Religious observance is shaped by

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6 For one classification scheme, see Levy 1997. I draw on some of the distinct claims Levy outlines, but my approach differs from his in trying to disaggregate claims about “culture” and in its focus on arguments for (and not just a typology of) the claims.

7 See, e.g., Barry 2001.

8 See Fraser 2003. While some collective identities tilt more toward one dimension or the other (class toward distribution and sexuality toward recognition), gender, race, and ethnicity seem more to be in the middle. In this paper, I focus on religion, ethnicity, nationality, and race as they have been the focus of debates about multiculturalism.
local and national culture, as the great differences between the Indonesian, Indian, and Iranian forms of Islam suggest, and cultures are informed by religious observance. As the legal scholar Lawrence Sager has observed, “[T]he normative distance between religion and culture may not be so very great” since culture often “sits just behind and—in public perception at least—dominates religious belief.” Influence runs in the other direction as well with religious practice shaping local and national cultures. Amish religion shapes the Amish way of life, and Native American tribal cultures shape Native American religious practice.

Liberal theory offers a way of conceptually distinguishing religion and culture. Both cultural affiliation and religious conviction may be central components of people’s identities, but the demands of religion, unlike the demands of culture, are matters of conscience, matters experienced as binding ethical commitments. As understood within liberal theory, moral, religious, and philosophical outlooks are explicit sources of normative authority. When a person takes a set of moral or religious beliefs to be true, they accept those beliefs as providing reasons for action. Cultures are not sources of normative authority in the same sense. We use the expressions “cultural norms” and “cultural values,” but these terms tend to be used to describe what members of a group already do rather than to characterize the perceived authority of what they do. Many of the values associated with a particular culture are understood by their adherents as deriving from religious or moral doctrines. Very few cultures, if any, coincide with a single source of normative authority, a singular moral or religious outlook; many cultures are characterized by a high degree of moral and religious diversity.

Take the case of someone who identifies as culturally Mexican American. Speaking Spanish, eating certain foods, and associating with other Mexican Americans may be viewed as integral aspects of Mexican American cultural identity; they constitute cultural norms. But these norms describe what it means to be Mexican American; they are not a source of normative authority in the way that Catholic beliefs and principles are a source of normative authority for Catholics. Being an observant Catholic means accepting the tenets of Catholicism as important guides for action. In contrast, being Mexican American does not require accepting the truth and authority of any particular values or principles. Insofar as there is such a thing as Mexican American values or principles, they seem to stem from religious (e.g. Catholic) aspects of Mexican American culture. I do not mean to overstate the rigidity of religious experience or the fluidity of cultural identity. There is incredible diversity in the way people practice religion and some cultures are more resistant to change than others. The point here is that religion is a source of normative authority in a way that cultural identity is not.

If we accept this distinction between religion and culture, then there are distinct reasons for accommodating religion, as opposed to non-religious elements of culture. Multicultural theorists have emphasized the value of culture and cultural membership in terms of its role in enabling individual freedom and supporting individual self-respect. In

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9 As Bhikhu Parekh puts it, “[T]here is hardly a culture in whose creation, constitution and continuation religion has not played an important part, so much so that we have few if any examples of a wholly secular or humanist culture” (2000: 146-47). This includes the modern cultures of the West, which have been deeply shaped by the values of Christianity.


Kymlicka’s view, culture serves as a “context of choice” and a social basis of self-respect. Religious affiliation, like cultural affiliation, can serve these purposes. But this is not the reason that liberal democracies give for accommodating the claims of believers, nor the reason why believers themselves seek accommodation. One leading reason in liberal democracies for religious accommodation is the recognition that they are especially weighty normative claims that bind the will of believers. Call this the **argument from the special nature of claims of conscience**. The project of liberal democracy presumes that people are ethical agents capable of acting in accordance with moral and political principles, and the constitutions of liberal democracies show respect for the ethical agency of citizens by protecting freedom of religion and conscience more generally. This means that no particular religious affiliation can be required for the enjoyment of basic liberties or for access to employment opportunities, and that the state must intervene to protect people against discrimination on religious grounds. Constitutional protections for religious freedom have helped ensure that liberal democracies are more pluralist than assimilationist in approach when it comes to religion.

Even where a pluralist approach is taken, religion continues to be a major source of controversy, in part because there is ongoing disagreement about the nature and scope of religious liberty, because in practice state action has tended to support some religious groups over others, and also because some religious groups reject the liberal view of privatizing faith. Religious groups are politically active in all contemporary democracies, and the nature and extent of their political involvement has always been controversial. In response to the classical liberal stance of separation of religion and politics, many religious groups contend that such an approach discriminates against religious individuals. Not only do they seek to bring their beliefs to bear on politics, they also seek special accommodations from the state to pursue their religious practices. The appeal to religious beliefs in political argument is controversial because they bring in irreconcilable bases for public political debate. How are members of a society to engage in public debate, let alone reach agreement, on educational, economic, or any other type of policy if each appeals to her own God as the ultimate basis of moral and political authority?

In Western Europe, the question about the proper relationship between religion and politics has once again moved to the forefront of political debate in part because of the migration and settlement of large numbers of Muslims. Many Muslims claim that they receive little public accommodation of their efforts to live according to Islam, especially when contrasted with the assistance already extended to Christians and Jews. This is most apparent in France, where the political doctrine of *laïcité* has made it particularly hard for Muslims to gain public accommodation of their religious practices.

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12 Kymlicka 1995: 82-93.
13 How pluralistic a polity’s approach is depends in part on the institutional approach governing religion, as well as the significance of religion in the wider society. There are two distinct institutional paradigms governing religion in liberal democratic states. Some states establish a particular Christian church as the state religion, coupled with limited support for nonestablished religious minorities (e.g. Britain, Norway); in some cases, the state may provide more or less equal support for a number of historically established religious groups (e.g. Netherlands, Belgium, Germany). The alternative institutional paradigm is the privatization of religion by way of strict separation of church and state (e.g. US, France), but in practice, some privileges are extended to religious associations, such as tax exemptions on religious property. See Zolberg and Woon 1999: 14-15 and Gutmann 2003: 178-91.
Muslim activists in Britain have been more successful in gaining public recognition of their religious activities, including public financing of Muslim schools, the building of mosques, and the provision of social welfare services through Muslim agencies, in part by emphasizing the unfairness of state establishment of one religion over others.\(^{14}\) The general conclusion, however, is that support for Islamic institutions in Western Europe is unequal to the support offered to Christian and Jewish institutions, and this inequality is one key basis of claims for public accommodation of religion. Call this the *argument from the fact of preferential treatment*. This argument can be seen as part of a larger move toward basing religious accommodation claims on the value of equality. Some prominent legal scholars have argued for interpreting the religion clauses of the First Amendment as not only norms of liberty but also antidiscrimination norms that single out religion for special protection not because religion is uniquely privileged but because religion, especially minority religions, is peculiarly vulnerable to discrimination, hostility, and neglect.\(^{15}\) Providing special accommodation to the dominant religious group in a society but not others is seen as a failure of equality.

**Language**

On its face, one might think that a pluralistic approach to language would not be as controversial as such an approach toward religion since language acquisition is cumulative and not zero-sum. That is, human beings are capable of learning to speak more than one language without losing the native language, whereas from the point of view of many religions, accepting one religion as the one right and true religion precludes acceptance of another. Yet, along with religion, language is at the center of cultural conflicts in contemporary liberal democracies. This is partly because immigrant-receiving countries on both sides of the Atlantic are committed to maintaining the dominance of one (or in a few cases, more than one) national language. Language has been an integral aspect of nation-state formation. As many scholars have emphasized, nation-states can avoid establishing one religion, but there cannot be a linguistic equivalent to separation of church and state. The state must choose a common language in which to conduct its affairs.\(^{16}\)

This difference between religion and language might explain why contemporary immigration countries are unabashed in taking a more explicitly assimilationist approach to language, in contrast to religion. In the course of liberalization, Western states relinquished the notion that a common religion was integral for national integration, but the opposite occurred with respect to language, which moved to the fore as the single most important element in the construction of national identity. A common means of

\(^{14}\) Fetzer and Soper 2005: 18-19; Modood 2005: 163-64.

\(^{15}\) See Eisgruber and Sager 2007.

\(^{16}\) Kymlicka 1995: 111; Carens 2000: 77-78; Patten 2001: 693. As I discussed above, states are not neutral toward religious groups either. For instance, many Western states effectively support the Christian religion in determining days of rest and public holidays, as well as in the allocation of financial support to religious schools. But the key point made by multicultural theorists here seems right. The pervasiveness of de facto linguistic establishment is much greater than de facto religious establishment in most liberal democracies: speakers of the majority language are favored not only in terms of the language that public officials and employees use with one another, but also the language in which public education and the vast array of public services are provided. And such establishment in the spheres of government and education influences the language skills required for the labor market.
communication was seen as crucial to nation-building. As scholars of nationalism have emphasized, nation-building has been fueled by more malign motives than the need for a lingua franca (not least racism and xenophobia) such that forging a common language entailed the domination and suppression of minority languages and identities. Consider the ethnolinguistic conflict in Eastern Europe after the fall of communism in 1989; the linguistic division and debate over official multilingualism in Canada and Spain; and the debate over bilingual education in the U.S. Such conflicts have been fueled by a nationalistic desire to enforce a common identity within the nation-state and to demarcate national insiders from outsiders. With a few exceptions, every immigration country has been intent upon maintaining the status quo of the dominant language and has so far succeeded in doing so.\(^\text{17}\)

Liberal multiculturalists have argued that, in light of the privileged position of one language within a nation-state, special accommodations are owed to linguistic minorities. On this argument from the \textit{“fact of linguistic establishment,”}\(^\text{18}\) linguistic accommodations for minority language speakers are intended to remedy the unfairness that arises from state establishment of one language. Because \textit{“[t]he state unavoidably promotes certain cultural identities, and thereby disadvantages others,”} in this case by privileging the language of a particular group, the state must make it up to those who are speakers of minority languages.\(^\text{19}\) It is important to note that the form of this egalitarian argument is the same as the argument for religious accommodation discussed above (a claim arising out of the fact of establishment or preferential treatment), but the content is different (in particular, the account of the good at stake). In the case of religion, we saw that the case for religious accommodation can be made without relying on the notion of culture; what is at stake in the case of religion is a matter of conscience of fundamental importance. What about in the case of language?

There are at least two ways of understanding the good of language within liberal theory. One understanding relies on a premise about the value of cultural identity in terms of dignity and self-respect. This premise is crucial to making the case that the “fact of linguistic establishment” should be a focus of collective concern. Language is constitutive of collective identity, and collective identity is valuable on account of its connection to individual dignity and self-respect.\(^\text{20}\) Language is “a marker of identity, a cultural inheritance and a concrete expression of community.”\(^\text{21}\) Collective identities are of fundamental importance to people such that they regard themselves as injured and humiliated when a group with which they identify is disadvantaged relative to other groups. If we accept these premises about the importance of collective identity and the role of language in constituting collective identity, then when the state establishes one

\(^{17}\) Zolberg and Woon 1999: 22-23.  
\(^{19}\) Kymlicka 1995: 108. Some governments have made moves toward \textit{de jure} linguistic establishment. By 1999, 22 states of the US had passed “official English” declarations (Schmidt 2000: 29). Many of these are purely symbolic in that they do not prevent the provision of public services in other languages, but such explicit public recognition of English strengthens the egalitarian case for accommodations for minority languages.  
\(^{20}\) This view of the good of identity (in particular, cultural identity) is taken by Margalit and Raz (1990), Taylor (1994), and sometimes also Kymlicka (“If a culture is not generally respected, then the dignity and self-respect of its members will also be threatened (1995: 89, citing Margalit and Raz 1990: 447-49).  
\(^{21}\) Green 1987: 659.
language over others as the language of public institutions, the state commits a kind of expressive harm against the speakers of other languages, undermining their dignity. It is this harm to dignity that gives rise to the demand for special linguistic rights or accommodations. This argument from dignity underscores the view that justice has a symbolic, as well as a material, dimension. Language issues are a matter of justice not simply in virtue of their effects on the distribution of liberties and opportunities but also in terms of their direct effects on the dignity and self-respect of individual members of linguistic minority groups. This argument cannot avoid reliance on a premise about the value of cultural identity in the way that the argument for religious accommodation discussed above can.

A second way of understanding the good of language is as a means for communication. This instrumental argument for linguistic accommodations need not rely on any premises about the value of cultural identity and its relationship to language. Instead, the claim is that linguistic accommodations are necessary for vindicating a set of fundamental rights. For instance, on this instrumental view, multilingual ballots in those languages most widely spoken in a particular area are defended as a means toward facilitating the right to vote. Bilingual education programs are defended as necessary for ensuring equal opportunity in education. Support for public media in the languages most widely used in a society is defended as a way to ensure real rights of political participation. On this instrumental understanding of language, the proper response to linguistic establishment is to provide special accommodations to linguistic minorities in order to realize basic goals of democracy, including the social and political inclusion of immigrants.

Most arguments for linguistic accommodation focus on the good that is lost when a language declines. Another way of arguing for linguistic accommodation is to focus on why such decline has come about. There are at least two arguments here. First is the corrective justice argument. If language serves as the basis of discrimination and hostility by the state or by employers, language rights for linguistic minorities may be defended as a remedy for such negative treatment. The politics of language is usually part of a larger program of nation-state formation and sub-state nationalist response. The marginalization or outright proscription of certain languages must be seen in the broader context of a racialized and/or xenophobic policy directed at marginalized groups, with indigenous peoples being perhaps the most marginalized of all. This is not to say that all or even most of the languages that are vulnerable today are vulnerable because of the oppression of their speakers. The relationship between poverty, powerlessness, and linguistic vulnerability is complicated. Where current language vulnerability is the result of injustice, the demand for special accommodations for these vulnerable languages is a demand for addressing the inequality caused by that injustice. The argument becomes

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22 Rubio Marín 2003 develops such a instrumental argument for language rights.

23 Any corrective justice argument requires further discussion about what counts as oppression or discrimination. Even if the state is not the agent of discrimination, social structures, such as caste systems, can deny basic freedoms to particular individuals. In addition, we cannot simply rely on the subjective perception of injustice and victimization (e.g. Anglophones in California and Front National supporters in France express concerns about being attacked or victimized by the immigrants in their midst) but rather we would need some intersubjective judgment about what counts as discrimination.

24 As Levy points out, many languages are vulnerable because they are unwritten or have taken written forms only recently (2003: 237).
more complicated when we confront cases of historical injustice. Normative analyses of language politics tend to begin with the present, asking what is owed to those who do not speak the dominant language, but this overlooks the history of how certain languages were accorded the status of “national” languages while others were “minoritized” and stigmatized through the politics of nation-state formation.\textsuperscript{25} I will say more about arguments from past oppression or historical injustice below.

Another argument that focuses on the cause of linguistic vulnerability, if not clear decline, is what we might call the \textit{argument from structural inequality}. Here the focus is not on past or present injustice by state or nonstate actors against individual speakers of minority languages but on the vulnerability of languages resulting from the powers of globalization that are everywhere implanting English as the lingua franca. “Law 101” in Quebec responds to fears that individual choices to learn English, largely based on economic factors (“It would be easier to get a job in the rest of Canada or the U.S.”), would undermine the long-term survival of the French language. Viewed globally, it’s not only French in Canada but also French in France that suffers structural disadvantage, and special measures by the state to protect the French language are defended as a response to this structural disadvantage. It’s important to note that on this argument it is the language that is structurally disadvantaged rather than the speakers of the language. Individuals—in particular, children—are being asked to bear the burdens of preserving a minority language, be it French, Welsh, or Basque.

The historical injustice and structural inequality arguments have been used to defend language rights for indigenous groups and national minorities who are also linguistic minorities, whereas the instrumental argument and the argument from linguistic establishment have been applied to defend linguistic accommodations for a broader range of linguistic minority groups, including immigrant groups.

\textit{Ethnicity and Nationality}

Many “cultural” claims are claims about religion and language made by ethnic and national minorities. This is not surprising since religion and language have historically been key markers of ethnicity and nationality.\textsuperscript{26} If we put aside claims of religion and language, what other sorts of multiculturalism claims are there? In the case of ethnic minorities, there are a broad range of claims for accommodation of aspects of culture other than language, as well as integration assistance and affirmative action programs. The key claim made by national minorities is for self-government rights.

First, consider the broad range of “cultural accommodation” claims, aside from language, made by ethnic minorities. “Culture” signifies the myriad customs and practices that constitute a way of life for a group of people: rituals, food, dress, family roles and interactions, musical and other artistic preferences, etc. Ethnic minorities have sought exemptions from general rules that penalize or constrain their customs. Many claims for exemption have been about \textit{religious} practices that conflict with mainstream policies in the public sphere or market (e.g. Sikhs and helmet laws, Muslim girls and bans on the headscarf, Amish and school regulations), and these can be defended by the arguments considered above in the section on religion. Ethnic minorities have also sought positive assistance from the state to pursue and preserve their group traditions (e.g.

\textsuperscript{25} May 2003 and Tully 1995.

\textsuperscript{26} See Hattam 2007 for a study of the origins of the concept of ethnicity in the U.S.
funding for ethnic associations), as well as symbolic recognition (e.g. national holidays, school curricula). As in the case of language, these claims for support of cultural traditions and practices have been defended in at least one of two ways. One argument relies on a premise about the value of cultural identity in terms of dignity and self-respect discussed above. Cultural identity is valuable on account of its connection to individual dignity and self-respect, and cultural accommodations are viewed as necessary to ensure the equal dignity of individual members of ethnic minority groups. Cultural accommodations may have the effect of promoting civic inclusion of immigrants by extending symbolic recognition to the cultural traditions of immigrant groups, but promoting integration is not the reason that cultural accommodations are defended on this argument. What’s at stake is not integration so much as the dignity and self-respect of ethnic minorities.

Another way of defending cultural accommodations is agnostic on the question of the value of the cultures of the groups in question. On this instrumental argument, cultural accommodations are desirable insofar as they promote the integration of ethnic minorities. It is important to note here that there are many integration assistance measures for new immigrants that don’t involve efforts to accommodate or preserve their cultural practices. Consider public funding that assists newcomers with learning the language of the host country, finding employment, and participating in politics. Such measures can be defended instrumentally as serving important goals of democracy: they promote the economic integration and political participation of immigrants.  

Another argument marshaled to defend special protections for ethnic minorities is the corrective justice argument discussed in the context of language. This argument is not used to defend exemptions or financial assistance for ethnic associations, but rather group-differentiated measures, including affirmative action programs, aimed at fighting current discrimination or remedying past discrimination. Such programs may take the form of consideration of one’s minority status in university admissions or employment decisions, and special political representation rights (e.g. redistricting to create black-majority or Hispanic-majority districts in the US, reserved seats for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in India). A distinct argument for affirmative action, developed and reaffirmed by the U.S. Supreme Court, is the diversity argument. This argument focuses not on inequality caused by past or present discrimination but on the benefits of racial and ethnic diversity for all members of society. I will say more about both of these arguments below.

Special accommodations for immigrants and ethnic minorities actually comprise a small part of leading theories of multiculturalism. The main focus has been on defending self-government rights for minority nations and aboriginal groups. It is no accident that the leading theorists of multiculturalism (Taylor, Tully, and Kymlicka) are writing in the context of Canada where the cultural protections that loom large are those for Quebec and First Nations, not ethnic minorities. In contrast to ethnic and racial minorities, minority nations have sought some measure of political autonomy through secession (Slovenia) and federal arrangements (Quebec, Catalonia, Native tribes). Self-government rights for minority nations and aboriginal peoples, as opposed to ethnic minorities, have been

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27 See Bloemraad 2006 for empirical support, based on a comparative study of the U.S. and Canada, for the claim that official multiculturalism policies promote rather than hinder the civic and political integration of immigrants.
defended in several ways. First, as Kymlicka has argued, national minorities have a prima facie right to self-government because they have maintained distinct “societal cultures” over time, whereas ethnic minorities have not. On this political-sociological argument, the fact that national minorities already possess institutional capacities to sustain “societal cultures” supports their case for self-government rights. One consequence of drawing the line this way is that it ignores the extent to which some immigrant ethnic cultures are institutionally embodied. It also excludes those indigenous groups who have suffered more cultural dislocation from self-government rights while including those groups that have succeeded in maintaining an institutionally embodied culture. The premise about the value of culture for the dignity and self-respect of individuals that Kymlicka and others have adopted applies to ethnic minorities, as well as to national minorities. Another argument that Kymlicka offers to justify limiting self-government rights to national minorities is a choice argument: many ethnic minorities chose to migrate and want to integrate, and such choice cancels the option of self-government rights. The difficulty here, as Kymlicka acknowledges, is drawing the line between involuntary refugees and voluntary immigrants in a world with massive economic inequalities and different levels of respect for human rights. In addition, if “immigrant” is taken to include the children of immigrants, the choice argument would only apply to a subset of the category “immigrant.”

Another way of defending self-government rights for national minorities and aboriginal groups is the corrective justice argument: such rights are required to counter ongoing discrimination or remedy the inequality stemming from historical injustice. It is usually past oppression that is said to give rise to a prima facie case for self-government rights for aboriginal groups. A key premise of this argument is that historical injustice is causally responsible for at least some of the systemic disadvantages that members of racial and ethnic minority groups suffer today. For instance, proponents of indigenous sovereignty have emphasized the importance of viewing indigenous claims against the historical background of the denial of equal sovereign status of indigenous groups, the dispossession of their lands, and the destruction of their cultural practices. This background calls into question the legitimacy of state authority over indigenous groups and serves as the basis of the claim that such injustice should be remedied through the restoration of some form of political self-rule. It should be said that the demands of historical injustice are distinct from present-day concerns of distributive justice. Japanese Americans had a compelling and ultimately successful claim for remedy of the gross

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28 Kymlicka takes institutional capacities as factual givens and bases his account of just institutions around them, but these capacities are highly contingent. He assumes that sovereignty requires a defined territory, overlooking institutional arrangements of deterritorialized sovereignty. See Choudhry (2002: 69-70) for examples, including immigrant communities that run schools, hospitals, nursing homes, media outlets, and voluntary associations, and the proposal that aboriginal peoples who are interspersed in the general population govern themselves with respect to social services, housing, and primary and secondary education.


30 Much of the literature on historical injustice focuses on the difficulty of counterfactual analyses and establishing causal links between past injustice and present disadvantage. The least difficult cases are those in which perpetrators and victims are still alive, but it becomes very complicated when perpetrators and victims are long gone and it is the descendants of the victims making the claims. The question here is why the descendants of perpetrators of an injustice must bear the responsibility of compensating the descendants of the victims. See Elster 1978; Lyons 1977; Sher 1979 and 1980; Waldron 1992.
injustice of mass internment during World War II, but they do not face systemic disadvantages as a group. Not only can the concern about historical injustice and contemporary inequality come apart, they may be in tension. For instance, there may be a trade-off between rights for linguistic minorities and socioeconomic mobility, where measures to protect vulnerable languages may inhibit linguistic assimilation of the speakers of those languages, thereby limiting their access to economic opportunities in the wider society.

Race

The leading theorists of multiculturalism have provided little guidance on the relationship between race, ethnicity, and culture. For instance, Kymlicka has written that his theory of multiculturalism is not intended to address the concerns of racial minorities, emphasizing that a sui generis approach is needed to address the structures of disadvantage that African Americans face. He leaves unclear the connections, if any, between the sorts of recognition claims made by ethnic and national minorities and such claims by racial minorities. In contrast, Charles Taylor includes African Americans in his discussion of multiculturalism when he focuses on the university “canon” wars and the issue of self-respect and the self-depreciation caused by demeaning images of them projected in the wider society. 31 More needs to be said about the relationship of claims made on the basis of race, ethnicity, and nationality and what, if anything, they have to do with “culture.”

Racial groups exist on a blurred continuum with ethnic groups, and because of this blurring, some scholars have adopted the term “ethnoracial” blocs. 32 One reason why ethnicity and race are grouped together in this way may be to underscore that both are historical and social constructs. Both race and ethnicity are associated with the body and physical markers (skin color, hair type, eye shape, and so on) presumed to be evidence of ancestral links to a certain geographical region. 33 Some philosophers of race have offered one way of distinguishing race and ethnicity in analytic definitions of these concepts: ethnicity has been used to group individuals on the basis of their presumed origins, whereas race has been used to group individuals hierarchically on the basis of their presumed origins. Hierarchy is a constitutive element of the category of race, but not of ethnicity. 34 Historical and contemporary meaning of these terms in the U.S. offer some support for this distinction. The degree of systematic subordination or privilege on the

33 The race-ethnicity distinction has varied according to the dominant discourses of racialization (see Omi and Winant 1986). In the early twentieth-century America, the dominant discourse was of race as biology and ethnicity as culture. In the nineteenth century, the terms race and ethnicity were used interchangeably when the Lamarckian belief in the heritability of acquired characteristics made culture and biology a continuum. Both racial and ethnic groups were seen to have distinctive cultural and biological traits. Cultural anthropologists like Franz Boas sought to break the connection between race and biology, arguing that human differences stemmed from culture, not biology. Ethnicity proved a useful category for those who wanted to preserve the idea of cultural differences between groups while distancing themselves from racial hierarchies. In particular, the idea of ethnicity was taken up by members of the Zionist movement who sought to preserve a notion of a distinct Jewish culture while opposing claims of innate Jewish racial inferiority. For analysis of the race-ethnicity distinction in the context of discourses of Jewish, Latino, and black immigrant identity, see Hattam 2007.
34 See Haslanger 2000.
basis of race in the U.S. has tended to exceed such treatment on the basis of ethnicity. While both races and ethnicities are demarcated by geographical associations that are linked to perceived body type, these associations have taken on far greater evaluative significance for how members of racial groups have been viewed and treated. And the degree to which ethnic groups in the U.S. have been victimized seems to have more to do with their racialization than with their ethnicity identity. This is an admittedly idealized conception of ethnicity as ethnicity has implications for power and status in many contexts, including India and China, as well as the U.S., even if race wields greater evaluative power than ethnicity in the latter. (Is discrimination in job hiring on the basis of Spanish surnames in the U.S. or Arab surnames in France based on racial or ethnic prejudice?) The relationship between race, ethnicity, and inequality is complicated and varies from place to place.

If this is true, then we can’t accept the simple formulation that ethnicity is about culture, whereas race is about status and power. As I discussed above, the pursuit of ethnic justice involves countering ethnic prejudice and remedying ethnic inequality. What about race—what role, if any, is there for considerations of culture in the pursuit of racial justice? Multiculturalism plays a role in antiracist education. Here the corrective justice argument reappears. It says that the recognition of the cultures of subordinated groups is a crucial way of countering racism and remedying racial inequality. A key premise of this argument is that racial oppression takes not only a material but also symbolic form. There is a redistribution and recognition dimension to the pursuit of racial justice. Racial injustice can occur through economic processes by which some groups are defined as low-paid menial laborers or an “underclass” excluded from the workforce. It can also occur through patterns of communication and representation by which the cultural traditions and identities of some groups are devalued and marginalized. One effect of racism has been to prevent subordinated groups from the full expression and development of their traditions and practices. If redress for discrimination only proceeds along redistributive lines, we ignore an important component of discrimination: misrecognition or nonrecognition of group identities that are tied to the dignity and self-respect of their members. This suggests that countering racism and its legacy requires a range of measures that counter the denigration of cultures associated with disfavored groups.

Another way of defending cultural recognition claims in the context of race is the diversity argument, which has been developed in the U.S. Supreme Court’s affirmative action case *University of California v. Bakke* (1978) and upheld in *Grutter v. Bollinger* (2003). This argument relies on two premises. First, a premise about the instrumental value of different “experiences, outlooks, and ideas” in the pursuit of knowledge: the diversity of experiences and outlooks is envisioned as providing an “atmosphere [of]

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35 For instance, it was arguably the racialization of Japanese Americans that led to their internment in contrast to German and Italian Americans during World War II (see Hollinger 1995: 37), just as it is the racialization of Arabs and Muslims in the West, as opposed to their religious or ethnic identities alone, that jeopardizes their civil liberties. See Waters 1990 on the benign and costless nature of symbolic ethnicity for white Americans and also Waters 1999 on ethnic identification by black immigrants from the Caribbean as a way to resist racialization.

36 See Fraser 2003.

37 On the importance of both antiracism and multiculturalism in education, see Blum 1992.

speculation, experiment and creation” that fuels the production and diffusion of knowledge, the primary aim of universities. The benefits of such diversity are seen to extend beyond the university to the wider society by training students to become future leaders of a diverse nation. A second premise of the diversity argument is that the diversity of “experiences, outlooks, and ideas” maps onto racial and ethnic diversity, such that racial and ethnic minorities are seen as possessing distinctive norms and outlooks. The diversity argument could be extended beyond institutions of higher education to apply to all educational settings, the workplace, the military, and other institutions: because diversity of “experiences, outlooks, and ideas” serves the goals of these institutions and because such diversity coincides with racial and ethnic diversity, racial and ethnic diversity ought to be promoted.

An important difference between the corrective justice and diversity arguments for affirmative action is that the latter does not distinguish between race and ethnicity, viewing cultural differences as the distinguishing mark of both race and ethnicity. As critics have noted, one problem with the diversity rationale is that it treats race like ethnicity and as a result fails to acknowledge the history of institutional discrimination that distinguishes subordinated racial groups from (nonsubordinated) ethnic groups. Writing for the majority in Bakke, Justice Powell presented his vision of America as “a nation of minorities,” including “Celtic Irishmen,” “Chinese,” “Austrian resident aliens,” “Japanese,” and “Mexican-Americans.” Powell omitted blacks from his list of groups, but he implies that blacks are analogous to white, Hispanic, and Asian ethnics in that each group has a distinctive cultural background and unique perspective to contribute to the university environment. Yet, Powell cites a list of cases that reflect racism, not cultural differences typically associated with ethnicity: an ordinance targeting Chinese residents; the mass internment of Japanese Americans; and Jim Crow laws excluding Mexican Americans from Texas juries. Powell’s decision demonstrates that an exclusive focus on the cultural differences among racial and ethnic groups can divert attention from racism and racial inequality.

Rejecting the diversity argument does not mean denying any role for multiculturalism in the pursuit of racial justice. On the corrective justice argument, fostering greater civic inclusion of historically marginalized groups requires the recognition of their distinctive historical experience and cultural contributions in the classroom and beyond. The politics of recognition might be understood as a means for expanding the symbolic bases of civic inclusion such that people of diverse backgrounds feel they have equal standing in the public sphere—not just in terms of material goods and resources but also in terms of dignity and self-respect.

Conclusion

I have tried to distinguish among different claims of multiculturalism associated with religion, language, ethnicity, nationality, and race with a focus on outlining key arguments made within liberal theory for the different claims.

Religion and language comprise much of the political theory discourse on multiculturalism. One type of argument for religious and linguistic accommodation is based on an account of the nature of the good at stake. Sometimes, the account relies on a notion of culture, sometimes not. We saw that one leading liberal argument for religious accommodation rests on a premise about the special nature of religious and moral beliefs, coupled with an egalitarian argument arising out of the fact of preferential treatment of certain religions over others. This argument does not rely on any premise about the value of culture. The idea of culture does play a role in some arguments for linguistic accommodation and other non-linguistic accommodations for ethnic and national minorities. Liberal arguments for linguistic accommodations take a form similar to the case for religious accommodation examined above (linguistic minorities are owed some remedy in light of state establishment of one language), but the account of the good at stake is different. On one view, language and other aspects of culture are valued in terms of their relationship to the dignity and self-respect of individuals. On another view, the case for linguistic and other ethnic accommodations does not rely on any such premise about the significance of culture; they are defended as a means to ensure equal opportunities in education or to promote the economic and political inclusion of immigrants. One way of arguing for self-government rights of national minorities and aboriginal groups also focuses on the nature of the good at stake: because these groups possess distinct cultures that are valuable for individual members in terms of dignity and self-respect and cultural preservation is best ensured if the groups are self-governing, they ought to be granted rights of self-government.

Another type of argument for a variety of multiculturalism claims is the corrective justice argument, which focuses on the cause of the disadvantaged status of a group. This argument has been made to defend linguistic accommodations, affirmative action for ethnic and racial minorities, and self-government rights for national minorities and aboriginal groups. Such rights have been defended as a remedy for present discrimination or historical injustice experienced by a group. It is also this background of historical injustice and contemporary marginalization that gives rise to arguments for multiculturalism’s role in antiracism.

The severity of institutionalized race discrimination has dwarfed ethnic and religious discrimination in U.S. history, but September 11 helped consolidate a new identity category in the West, merging religion, ethnicity, and race, such that people who appear Middle Eastern, Arab, South Asian, or Muslim have been subject to harassment and violence. To what extent is contemporary Islamophobia religious and ethnic and to what extent racial? British sociologist Tariq Modood notes the difficulty of disentangling anti-religious prejudice from racist prejudice experienced by South Asian Muslims in Britain today.宗教, ethnicity, and race operate together with other social factors, including gender, class, region, and immigrant background, in generating new structures of inequality. This suggests that the sorts of arguments that have been most relevant to racial minority groups in the U.S. (aimed at addressing the effects of discrimination) may become more relevant to groups that are typically identified as ethnic or religious minorities.

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42 Modood 2005: 169. For more on the claim that the events of September 11 helped forge a new racialized identity category, “Middle Eastern, Arab, or Muslim,” see Volpp 2002.
We have seen that the “claims of culture” are about remedying serious disadvantages—not just material but also symbolic disadvantages—that minority groups face, along religious, linguistic, ethnic, and racial lines. Grouping the variety of claims considered in the paper under terms like “cultural rights” and “cultural accommodations” masks important distinctions. If what is at issue is religious observance, linguistic barriers to equal opportunity, or discrimination based on race, ethnicity, or religion, then we should say that that is what is at issue, not announce another “culture war” or “culture conflict.”
References


