Abstract. In rejecting the liberal claim to the universality of morals, some contemporary philosophers insist on the danger of reducing the human being to an abstraction. This paper goes beyond this debate. The theoretical core of multiculturalism is the recognition that these universalistic claims can be realised in different ways in different cultures, so as to require a re-conception of the liberal thesis of the well-being and dignity of people. This interpretation of morality cannot be understood within the ideology of nationalism. Replacing nationalism as the common bond of society is thus one of the main political challenges facing multiculturalism. However, any specific policy must presuppose a new social sensitivity: Societies are not made up of majorities and minorities, but of a plurality of cultural groups. This is why the notion of toleration is not enough.**

1.

You will remember the dark and haunting music introducing us to the dungeon where Florestan is languishing. When Leonore first sees him she is unnerved by her inability to recognise him. Her doubt persists, but after a couple of minutes it no longer troubles her:

Wer du auch seist, ich will dich retten
Bei Gott, du sollst kein Opfer sein!
Gewiß, ich löse deine Ketten,
Ich will, du Armer, dich befrein. (Sonnleithner and Treitschke 1995, 115)¹

In those few minutes Leonore turned from a devoted wife struggling to save her husband to a moral volunteer sharing in the struggle of the oppressed

¹ “whoever you are, I will save you, by God! You shall not be a victim! For sure, I’ll loosen your chains, I’ll free you, poor man” (Beethoven’s Fidelio).

* This is the text of a talk given at the University of Bremen 1997. The place and occasion explain its emphasis on the way recent waves of immigration affect the problems of multiculturalism, and the fact that it does not deal with the problem as it exists where different cultural or national groups enjoy long standing dominance in certain regions. For a more systematic treatment of the subject see the works mentioned in the list of references.

** Abstract by Antonio Rotolo.
wherever they are, and the opera has completed its transformation from the
romantic comedy of the opening scene into the political drama that it is.

This journey from love for an individual to sympathy for human beings is
a powerful modern narrative. We are often told that morality emerged in this
way, as a universalised understanding and universalised sympathy: We
come to understand that others have the feelings, hopes and aches that we
and our loved ones have, and we extend our sympathies from our loved
ones to all those who, as we now see, are like them.

This enlightenment narrative provides ammunition to some modern
critics of the so-called “enlightenment project.” The enlightenment, they say,
has thrown out the baby with the bath water. In recognising that morality
overcomes people’s partiality to themselves the enlightenment has—those
critics claim—created a monster: a universalised individual who is stripped
of everything which makes people human, and is reduced to a sheer abstrac-
tion. The enlightenment project is the morality of this abstract individual,
and like abstract individuals, it is barren of any content.

As a challenge to the universality of morality such criticism is totally
misguided and confused. The universality of morality is rooted in the nature
of moral thought: in the fact that generality is of the essence of all conceptual
thought, that morality is necessarily knowable, and that moral principles are
essentially intelligible, rather than arbitrary givens.

But the confused criticism of the universality of morals arises out of com-
prehensible, even laudable, motives and concerns. It reflects the realisation
that in respecting humans as humans we are in danger of understanding
them and their needs as if they were our own clones, as if what is good for
us is good for them. From childhood on we are saturated with words of
wisdom which emphasise the universality of morality: “Love thy neighbour
as thyself,” we are told. “Do unto others as you would be done by.” These
are, of course, when properly understood, perfectly true words of wisdom.
But they are also very dangerous. They are liable to encourage the tendency
to understand others by direct reference to oneself: “When I was young I did
not have a television. I do not understand why the young today must have
television.” “I never went to a mosque, why should we give those new-
comers mosques just because they want them?”

One of the theoretical—rather than merely political—challenges multi-
culturalism gives rise to is how to combine the truth of universalism with the
truth in particularism.

Multiculturalism is a new word. The Oxford English Dictionary traces it
back to the late 50s and early 60s. But does it designate a new ethical idea?
Does it respond to a new social and political reality? The answer to these
questions is far from clear. After all people have lived in societies which
were, for much of their history, multicultural. So what is distinctive about
the idea? The coexistence of cultural, ethnic and religious communities
within one political society, within one state, has been the condition of
European countries long before they knew of themselves as European. Large scale immigration from one country to another is a more fitful aspect of history, but it is certainly not new. The 19th century in particular saw massive movement of people in Europe, and predominantly out of Europe, to Argentina, Canada, the United States, Southern Africa, etc. To be sure many aspects of immigration during the second half of the 20th century are without precedent. But that does not explain why multiculturalism arose in the late 20th century and not before.

You may say that apart from the word there is nothing new in it, that it is simply a return to how we were before the triumph of nationalism and its ideology some hundred and fifty years ago. For I believe that it was not until the triumph of nationalism that the thought which seems so natural as to be almost inescapable to us, that is the thought that only common ethnicity, a common language, and a common culture can constitute the cement which bonds a political community, became the commonplace that it is today. Some of us were brought up to think of nationalism as liable to lead to regrettable extremes, but as essentially a liberating, and therefore an essentially just movement. The ideology of one nation one state was however responsible for many of the acts of oppression that Europe has known over the last two centuries, and for much of the misery that parts of Europe experience today. In a way multiculturalism is one of the strands in modern political thought which is trying to undo some of the harm done by nationalism.

I say that it is but one of several political and theoretical moves sharing this aim. The dominant one is of course that of the European Union itself, namely the movement towards political integration of the countries of the Common Market, and others, which will pull aspects of their sovereignty together to create a Federal Europe. Developments in the Union are a product of political fears and economic hopes. Neither are particularly good foundations for a political community. Their theoretical underpinnings are clearer, I suspect, to historians than to philosophers, but the reaction against nationalism is no less evident there than it is in multiculturalism. Both multiculturalism and its big brother the European Union reject the thesis that a common nationality is necessary for the viability of a political community. So does another European movement familiar to all of us: the movement whose slogan is Europe of the regions. I think that it is a mistake to regard it simply as a revival of the national movements which lost in the battle for nationalist supremacy during the 19th century. Some of the advocates of the ideas of Europe of the regions did not participate in that struggle. The Scots are an example of such a people. The 18th century was in many ways the golden age of Scotland, and the country did not share in the nationalist fervour of the 19th century. Besides, while Europe of the regions is advocated by supporters of various nationalist movements, for the most part they do not wish to secede from their countries, and they do not uphold the traditional nationalist ideal.
of the nation-state. Rather they support devolution of powers to the regions within larger political units, both national and European. Europe of the regions, along with the movement for a European Union and for multiculturalism reject common nationality as the common bond on which political units must be based.

All three have to face the same hard challenge: What can replace common nationality as the cementing bond of a political unit? For it cannot be denied that nationalism has proven a very effective political cement for people in the grip of nationalist fervour or anxiety. Those who wish to displace it are inevitably suspected of political naïveté. This is the political challenge, as against the theoretical challenge—which multiculturalism—along with the European movement, and the ideal of Europe of the regions—has to face: How do they conceive of the political bond? What will replace nationalism, according to them?

But perhaps the most basic challenge to multiculturalism, the challenge which has to be addressed before any of the others is the moral challenge: Why multiculturalism? What is the moral reason for trying to go down this road in the first place? Our countries are, no doubt, far from ideal. But we uphold—I will be assuming—certain ideals, which I will call the ideals of Western Liberalism, or, if you prefer, the ideals of Western Social Democracy. These combine an endorsement of democratic government, individual liberties, a welfare state, and a market driven economy. These headlines allow for considerable disagreement both about the implementation of these ideals, their precise nature, and their justification. But for my purpose today there is no need to explore those. The basic point is that these ideals give the lie to the charge that anything here is blinkered by a devotion to an abstract and barren conception of a universal Man. Rather, liberal politics arise out of the application of a universal humanistic morality to the conditions of the Western capitalist societies in their post-industrial stage. Within the political frameworks which these principles sanction, and which to a lesser or greater degree do in fact prevail in the western democracies, cultural institutions can and sometimes do flourish, various churches can and do operate, diversity is unhindered, and no legitimate human interests are ignored. So what is the moral need for a new ideal, that of multiculturalism?

2.

In a way multiculturalism is not a new doctrine. Morality is after all universal, and therefore immutable. Moreover, the fundamentals of morality, in as much as they apply to us, are not a mystery. In one way or another they are known. Rather multiculturalism brings with it a new way of conceiving an old truth, putting it centre stage, not letting us forget about it. It reflects a new sensitivity to the facts which establish this moral truth. And in particular it warns us against the dangers of each one of us understanding the
universal in terms of him- or her-self, a danger which is particularly great when the other is an alien in our country, when we are at home, and he is not.

I am suggesting that we should not think of multiculturalism primarily as an ethical or political theory, but as a way of marking a renewed sensitivity, a heightened awareness of certain issues and certain needs people encounter in today’s political reality. The term was used first in, and applied to, Canada. “Multiculturalism,” means—among other things—the coexistence within the same political society of a number of sizeable cultural groups wishing and in principle able to maintain their distinct identity. Multiculturalism is with us to stay. In so far as one can discern the trend of historical events it is likely to grow in size and importance. In its birthplace, Canada, three forms of multiculturalism exist: First, the coexistence of indigenous people: Inuits and various American Indian nations alongside the “old immigrants” of European stock. Second, the coexistence of anglophone and francophone communities of “old immigrants.” And, third, the coexistence of the immigrants of west European stock, who are mostly “old immigrants,” with the mostly new immigrants from Asia and southern Europe. In Britain the situation is very different. We have predominantly two forms of multiculturalism, the coexistence of the four peoples, Scots, Welsh, Irish and English whose union created the United Kingdom, and their coexistence with new immigrant communities, mainly Afro-Caribbean, Hindu-Indian, and a variety of Muslim communities, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Indian, and others.

It is the diverse forms which multiculturalism takes in different countries which makes it difficult to think of multiculturalism as more than a new moral sensitivity. The multicultural policies appropriate in different countries vary greatly, and any useful generalisations one can think of allow for many exceptions. Nevertheless multiculturalism is more than just a new moral sensitivity. I have suggested, elsewhere, that what we may call Liberal Multiculturalism is a normative precept motivated by concern for the dignity and well-being of all human beings. It is a precept which affirms that in the circumstances of contemporary Western societies a political attitude of fostering and encouraging the prosperity, cultural and material, of cultural groups, and respecting their identity, is justified.

This precept has far-reaching ramifications. It calls on us radically to reconceive society, changing its self-image. We should learn to think of our societies as consisting not of a majority and minorities, but as constituted by a plurality of cultural groups. Naturally such developments take a long period to come to fruition, and they cannot be secured through government action alone, as they require a widespread change in attitude. The current attitude of the population at large, and the speed with which it accepts the precepts of multiculturalism, set limits on the practicability and good sense of proceeding with various concrete policies to advance and implement liberal multiculturalism. But we must think long term to set short term policies within a sensible context. The size of cultural groups and their viability is
another variable affecting the way various concrete measures should be pursued. Where publicly funded programmes are called for relative size is inevitably a consideration. So is viability. There is no point in trying to prop up by public action cultures which have lost their vitality, which have become moribund and whose communities—usually their young members—drift away from them. Of course multiculturalism changes the prospects of survival for cultures it supports. That is its aim. But it recognises that deliberate public policies can serve a useful purpose only if they find response in the population they are meant to serve. They can serve to facilitate developments desired by the population, but not to force cultural activities down the throats of an indifferent population.

The more concrete policies, which become appropriate gradually, as developments justify, will be varied and highly dependent on local conditions. They will include measures like the following:

1. The young of all cultural groups of significant size should be educated, if their parents so desire, in the culture of their groups. But all of them should also be educated to be familiar with the history and traditions of all the main cultures in the country and an attitude of respect for them should be cultivated.

2. The different customs and practices of the different groups should, within the limits of permissible toleration, be recognised in law and by all public bodies in society, as well as by private companies and organisations which serve the public, be it as large employers, providers of services and in other ways. At the moment petty intolerance is rife in many countries. In Britain people still have to fight to be allowed to wear traditional dress to school or to work, to give one example.

3. It is crucial to break the link between poverty, under-education and ethnicity. So long as certain ethnic groups are so overwhelmingly over-represented among the poor, ill-educated, unskilled and semiskilled workers the possibilities of cultivating respect for their cultural identity, even the possibility of members of the group being able to have self respect and to feel pride in their cultures are greatly undermined.

4. There should be a generous policy of public support for autonomous cultural institutions, such as communal charities, voluntary organisations, libraries, museums, theatre, dance, musical or other artistic groups. Here (as in education) the policy calls for allocation of public resources. In the competition for them the size of the groups concerned is an important factor. It works in two ways. By and large it favours the larger groups with a more committed membership. But it also calls for disproportionate support for small groups which are strong enough to pass the viability test. Given that the overheads are significant the per capita cost of support for small viable cultural groups is greater than for large ones.

5. Public space, streets, squares, parks, shopping arcades, etc. (as well as air space on television) should accommodate all the cultural groups. Where
they differ in their aesthetic sense, in their preferences for colours, patterns, smells, music, noise and speed, the way to do so may involve dividing some public spaces between them, as often happens without direction in ethnic neighbourhoods, while preserving others as common to all.

Of course all such measures are designed to lead to relatively harmonious coexistence of non-oppressive and tolerant communities. They therefore have their limits. But it is important not to use false standards as tests of the limits of toleration. The fact that the Turkish government does not tolerate certain practices of the Kurds, let us say, in Turkey, is no reason why the Kurds from Turkey should not be allowed to continue with the practices when they settle in Europe.

Similarly, the fact that tolerating certain practices of immigrant communities will lead to a change in the character of some neighbourhoods or public spaces in one’s country is no reason for suppressing them. It is natural that we should wish to preserve the character of neighbourhoods and public spaces. Our lives, and the quality of our lives, are bound up with them. But so are the lives of others, and many of them, be they the younger generation, that is our children, or members of other cultural groups, may find ungenial what we find congenial. We owe them what we owe ourselves, that is the ability to feel at home in their own home, for once they emigrated to a country it has become their home.

Nevertheless there are significant limits to toleration. I will mention four: First, all cultural communities should be denied the right to repress their own members. This applies as much to homophobia among native Germans, as to female circumcision among Somali immigrants. Second, no community has a right to be intolerant of those who do not belong to it. All forms of racism or other manifestations of lack of respect should be discouraged by public policy, though not necessarily outlawed or criminalised. Third, the opportunity to leave one’s community must be a viable option for its members. There should be a public recognition of a right of exit from one’s community. Finally, liberal multiculturalism will require all groups to allow their members access to adequate opportunities for self-expression and for participation in the economic life of the country, and the cultivation of the attitudes and skills required for effective participation in the political culture of the state (Raz 1994, 157–58).

3.

I have mentioned some concrete multicultural policies, not in order to recommend them to any government for immediate implementation. As I mentioned we have to assess such policies carefully against local conditions, and available alternatives (Raz 1986, 427). I mentioned them to illustrate the sort of policy consequences I have in mind when discussing multiculturalism. I will say no more of its practical consequences. I hope, however, that
what I said begins to address the third challenge, which I called the moral challenge. *Why multiculturalism*, it asked, given that we have civil and political rights, including a right to non-discrimination? One way in which the challenge can be understood is this: can all the policies and political attitudes which multiculturalism advocates be encompassed by and derived from doctrines of basic rights and non-discrimination? The preceding remarks show that the answer is No. Policies such as teaching everyone in a country the language and culture of minority groups cannot be derived from doctrines of non-discrimination. Moreover, I want to emphasise again that multiculturalism involves more than specific policies. It involves a change in attitudes, and in the ways we understand our societies and think of them. To repeat the point: it involves primarily thinking of our societies as consisting not of a majority and minorities, but as constituted by a plurality of cultural groups. Nothing like this follows from rights against discrimination, or of freedom of religion, or any of the other basic rights.

Not everyone will take the fact that the precepts of multiculturalism cannot be derived from traditional liberal rights as a point in their favour. On the contrary, many will say that this shows that multiculturalism cannot be justified. But that would be a mistake. Those who take this stand are really guilty of a charge levelled by some anti-liberal writers: They disregard the fact that people’s prosperity and dignity derive their concrete forms from the shared social meanings in the societies in which they live (Raz 1994, 177–78). People’s well-being consists in their success in valuable relationships and activities. Their social and other skills to engage in activities and pursue relationships derive from their own cultures, and their sense of their own dignity is bound up with their sense of themselves as members of certain cultures. Up to a point people can retrain and acquire the skills needed to make a life in another culture. In a multicultural society it is important to give people the opportunity to do so. This is what I called the right to exit (Raz 1995, 181). But not all could do so, and not all would want to do so. The case for letting people have the chance to carry on with their own cultures and ways of life derives in part from the fact that people’s ability to retrain and adapt are limited. But it depends on something even more important: on the fact that such demands, that is the demand for a forced retraining and adaptation is liable to undermine people’s dignity and self-respect (Raz 1994, 178). It shows that the state, their state, has no respect for their culture, finds it inferior and plots its elimination.

It is tempting to reply to this that the problem is one of transition. The considerations I mentioned: The difficulty and pain of adapting to a new culture and abandoning one’s own, and people’s limited capacity for successful adaptation to a new culture, are all factors which affect people who are already conscious of belonging to one culture rather than another. Newborn babies have no such problems. They may just as easily be brought up to be Chinese, as Indonesian, as French or German, or Turks. This is true. But it is
not really relevant unless one is willing to contemplate the monstrosity of tearing children away from their parents and bringing them up as prescribed by the state. Given the fact that parents are the most formative influence on children, if the problem is one of transition then the transition is stretched out over many generations.

So the ethical challenge: why multiculturalism? is answered by our concern for the well-being and dignity of people. Unfortunately, this answer only serves to emphasise the seriousness of the political challenge: what, according to multiculturalist views, is the bond which unites a political society, since they reject common nationality as a common bond?

4.

I think that we have to admit that this is a serious challenge. It also harbours serious dangers. The truth is that our understanding of the bonds which keep a political society together is very tenuous. There are serious dangers of acting immorally out of exaggerated fears and anxieties. Let me reflect first on the dangers.

One of the most familiar bonds which holds countries together is a common enemy. As we know, most commonly though not exclusively the enemy is a foreign country which represents a threat to one’s existence or to one’s vital interests. Sometimes it is an ideological enemy: an alien religion, or ideology. Sometimes, it is an enemy within.

If I may deviate for a moment: the thesis about the advantages of having a common enemy was the first theoretical political thesis I was ever struck by. I was a teenager at an Israeli high school when we had a lecture, in a series in which successful people talked about ideas from various aspects of the economy and society. That time the lecturer was a leading Israeli politician and he explained that the absence of peace between Israel and its neighbours should not be regarded, as official Israeli propaganda and public media presented it, as a tragedy. On the contrary it was a blessing: a factor which galvanised the national energies. It led Israelis to high achievements in science and technology. It created an educated and alert people, and stopped the assimilation of the country into the Middle East with its Levantine culture of sloth, slovenliness and sleaze.

I expect you do not need me to argue against the proposition that we should strive for a state of perpetual cold or hot war in order to foster unity. The point I am making is that we reject that proposition not because we believe that the threat of a common enemy cannot bring people together. Everyone I know believes that it can. We reject it as a means of forging unity in spite of the fact that it is an effective means, because it is an immoral means.

So we should be careful in invoking the clarion call of national unity, and of the need for a common bond. We should not let it lead us to policies of oppression against groups living in our countries.

Having said that I should immediately add that the question of a political bond is very important. We are all struggling with it at several levels: The enterprise of European Unity depends on our ability to forge or to strengthen a sense of European identity as the backbone of the Union. Often the political leaders of Europe seem to be but little aware of this fact. Too often they give the impression that they think that unity depends on institutional ties, and on common economic interests alone. This mistake is even more unforgivable today than it was when it was made by the leaders of the communist movement, if only because we have their mistake to learn from.

As I said before, in various aspects of politics and political theory we are struggling to replace the ideology of nationalism which has dominated Europe for a hundred and fifty years. European unity and multiculturalism both raise the same political challenge for both aim to replace nationalism as the common bond of political society. The need for such a bond cannot be doubted. Political societies are characterised by the fact that they claim authority over individuals, and in the name of that authority they not infrequently require individuals to make sacrifices for the benefit of other members of the same political society. Re-distributive taxation, regional policies, and all the institutions of the welfare state are examples of state institutions imposing sacrifices on some for the sake of others. The willingness to share is not purchased easily. Without it a political society soon disintegrates, or has to rely on extensive use of force and coercion.

How is the willingness to share maintained?

Some of the things which can be safely said about this question are true but do not take us far enough. Members of a modern political society need to share a common culture. This is true, but it is easy to read exaggerated conclusions from this harmless observation. We know that a common culture does not mean a common religion, and it does not mean membership of a common ethnic or racial group. It does not even mean a common language, though the absence of a common language can be a nuisance. When I say that none of these is necessary for a willingness to share in a common political society I do not mean that they do not help. They certainly do help where they are present. But they are not necessary, and this is just as well, for the thought that political societies must be based on common religion or race is not much more appealing than the suggestion that they must be based on a common enemy.

So what is the truth in the talk of the importance of a common culture? It is not easy to summarise. There are many diverse factors to consider. Here are a few: First, for a country’s economy to function well there must be a general knowledge of the basic skills required for it: a more general sharing of the more general skills, and a smattering of understanding, and more specialised training in the more specialised skills.

Second, a democratic political system depends on literacy, access to information, a certain understanding of political issues and of political processes.
Third, willingness to share depends on capacity for empathy. It depends on the ability of people to feel for others and that depends on their ability to understand and empathise with other people’s experiences, aspirations and anxieties.

A variety of factors contribute to the realisation of these conditions: sharing in the same economic system leads to acquisition of similar skills and to a shared understanding of the relatively technical aspect of how things work, and what people’s fortunes depend on. The existence of democratic institutions and of free mass media spreads a shared understanding of the nature of political processes, and of the constraints which political action must meet. It also familiarises people with the life styles prevalent in the society, and with other people’s points of view and aspirations. The existence of a common education, and of a multicultural syllabus which makes the cultures of all cultural groups familiar to all members of a society are essential to the spread of mutual understanding and respect.

I have listed some factors which show the truth in the thesis that a common culture is necessary for a political society. But let me repeat again my caution on the matter. For one thing, a common culture is not enough. In some sense all European countries share a common culture, so do all those countries which once belonged to the French Empire, or to the British Empire. But this does not make them ready to participate in one political society.

Other factors are important as well: restricting inequalities of income and wealth helps to limit gaps in life-expectancy, in health and in general expectations, gaps which often make people on the opposite sides of the social and economic divide incapable of understanding and empathising with each other.

But none of this gets to the heart of the matter. And it is our limited understanding of what lies at the heart of the matter which accounts for our uncertainties. Ultimately political unity depends on people’s free and willing identification with the political society they belong to: on the fact that they feel German, that their sense of their own identity as German is totally instinctive and unproblematic. And it depends on the fact that they are proud to be German.

Among the things which our very imperfect understanding of the condition of identification teaches us are the following few: First, identification involves a sense of belonging, of being a part of a larger whole. Second, people identify with a variety of groupings and institutions: they belong to a family, to a workplace, to a party, to a sports club, to a religious group, etc. We know that multiple identifications do not generally conflict with each other. On the contrary, they are often mutually supportive. Third, it is particularly important that identification with a political society does not replace, but incorporates identification with other groups in that society. It is generally agreed that the communist attempt to suppress all other groups has been disastrous and many studies nowadays emphasise the importance of the coexistence of a multiplicity of foci of identification.

Coming now to points more directly relevant to multiculturalism: it is of vital importance for the ability of one group to be able to identify with the political society that their membership of the smaller group is respected by the political society; this applies to all aspects of identity. A political society which does not respect gays, or Christians, or black people, cannot expect that those it fails to respect will identify with it, and it does not deserve their allegiance (Raz 1994, 184). So an important condition of identification with a political society is that that society respects its members (Raz 1994, 157). To respect them it has to respect their cultures, their religions etc. To that extent multiculturalism, far from being a threat to the common bond which unites a political society is one of the factors contributing to it.

5.

I will say nothing about the theoretical challenge which liberal multiculturalism encounters. What I have said so far is sufficient to show how I see the universal and the particular to be complementary rather than antagonistic, and the point has always been clear in the best philosophical tradition, that is the one descending from Aristotle: The universal must find expression in the particular and the particular can only get its meaning from the fact that it is subsumed under the universal. In placing multiculturalism in that tradition I am placing it firmly beyond what mere toleration will vindicate.

The thought is not that we must excuse members of other cultures their cultures, for they know no better. That is true too, but it is only part of the truth. Nor is it the thought that one must tolerate cultural minorities or they will destabilise the state. That is true too, but it is not the core concern.

At the heart of multiculturalism lies the recognition that universal values are realised in a variety of different ways in different cultures, and that they are all worthy of respect (Raz 1994, 120; 179; Raz 1986, 265). This—I should emphasise—is not to endorse all aspects of any culture. My culture no less than others is flawed. Many cultures are flawed in similar ways: The suppression of sexuality, at least in some of its forms, is common to many, to give but one example. We should fight superstition, repression and error wherever we find them, in our culture and in others. When we do so we are of course constrained by principles of toleration and of respect for people. But we should not confuse the fight against error and repression with the condemnation of cultures other than our own. We should recognise that they realise important values, and that they provide a home, and a focus of identity which are entirely positive to their members, just as our culture realises important values, and provides a home and a focus of identity for us.

This is why multiculturalism transcends what any principles of toleration can provide. Principles of toleration restrain us regarding what we may do in the elimination of error. Multiculturalism denies that the variety of
cultures it enjoins us to protect and support are in error. They are seen essentially as different ways in which universal values are realised.

These comments bring me—at the conclusion of my talk—to the point I started from: the thought that multiculturalism is primarily a matter of a new moral sensibility. I said there that it is a sensibility which takes more seriously the otherness of the other, a sensibility which stops us from forcing our own ways on the other, just because he follows a different style of life, because he comes from a different culture. Think of the point I just made a minute ago: We tend to condemn alien cultures when we find them riddled with error. But we do not condemn our own culture when we find it riddled with error. The idea is not even conceivable for most people. For each person his own culture covers the horizon.

This is well and good, but then nor should we condemn other cultures for their failings, rather we should—as we do with our own—reject the failings, but not the culture as a whole. The ability to do so requires more than theoretical knowledge of the right moral principle. It requires understanding and sensitivity. To acquire it we must do more than understand others, and the role their own culture plays in their life. We must understand ourselves better, we must acquire the ability not to take our culture for granted. To regard it not as the epitome of human achievement but as no more than one necessarily imperfect manifestation of the human spirit.

As I said, there is nothing theoretically new in that. But there is a long way from knowing it and being able to live by it.

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