



ANDREW SHORTEN

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# **Multiculturalism**

## **The Political Theory of Diversity Today**

Andrew Shorten

polity

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# **Dedication**

*For Catherine*

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# 1

## Introduction

This is a book about the normative political theory of multiculturalism. Its subject matter is a set of arguments, theories and recommendations, all of which have been proposed by political theorists during the last thirty years, and all of which, in some way or another, concern how democratic societies should respond to the cultural differences they contain. Like many of the other 'isms' discussed in normative political theory, there is considerable disagreement not only about the merits of multiculturalism, but also, more fundamentally, about what it consists in. Consequently, one thing I will try to bring out in the following chapters is the internal diversity of multicultural political theory, which contains strands drawn from very different traditions, amongst which there are deep tensions and even disagreements.

Over the course of the book, I will not attempt to defend any particular theory of multiculturalism - as one might argue for a radical feminism as opposed to a liberal one, for example, or for an egalitarian form of liberalism over a *laissez-faire* one. Indeed, as will become clear, I am doubtful about whether it really is possible for a single normative theory of multiculturalism to provide appropriate guidance about each of the different issues associated with cultural diversity in contemporary politics and public life. Theories designed in response to differences of nationality or language, for example, are often only tangentially relevant to the situation of religious minorities. With this in mind, I will propose another way to think about multicultural political theory: not as a single theory, but

instead as a set of overlapping responses to a series of interrelated, but distinctive, issues.

To support and illustrate this way of characterizing multicultural political theory, I will look carefully at some of the different and specific contexts in which arguments for multiculturalism have been suggested and contested, including ones about the accommodation of religious minorities, about language rights, about political autonomy for national groups, and about immigration and social cohesion. I hope to demonstrate that attending carefully to the complex issues which arise in these very different settings reveals that arguments drawn from a variety of contexts and traditions can be a fertile and instructive source of inspiration for societies confronted by different forms of diversity. Moreover, just as we should not expect to discover a single, cohesive and overarching framework from which to address all of the different issues raised by the politics of diversity, I will argue that multicultural political theory has important limits. For example, a running theme in the book is that it can provide at best a partial and incomplete perspective on the complex moral and political issues involved in the relationship between Indigenous peoples and settler colonial states. In this case, and in others too, multicultural ideas will need to be complemented with additional theoretical resources.

In recent years, there has been something of a backlash against multiculturalism, both in the comparatively calm waters of academic political theory and in the stormier ones of real-world politics. Rumours of multiculturalism's demise, however, have been exaggerated. One reason for this is that some key claims associated with multiculturalism have become so firmly established that it is difficult to imagine them being dislodged. For example, in most democratic societies it is no longer controversial that national minorities are entitled to some form of

recognition, that the implementation of public policies should be responsive to differences of language and religion, and that minority religious beliefs and practices should sometimes be accommodated. Of course, the form that recognition, responsiveness and accommodation should take is disputed, but these are issues about how to do multiculturalism, and not about whether it should be done at all. Furthermore, some of the supposed alternatives to multiculturalism, such as policies to promote social cohesion or the emergence of a new agenda of interculturalism, take up themes and ideas already present in multicultural political theory, and are better understood as being continuous with multiculturalism rather than being opposed to or in conflict with it.

In the remainder of this introduction, and before setting out the plan of the book ahead, I will attempt to define, at least in very general terms, what multiculturalism is, and to set out some of the main political claims associated with it.

## **What is Multiculturalism?**

Multiculturalism is a slippery term, not least because it is used both descriptively, to signify the presence of more than one culture, and normatively, to refer to a theory about how political communities should deal with differences of culture and identity. Stuart Hall (2000) suggested a helpful variant of this distinction, distinguishing the adjective 'multicultural' from the noun 'multiculturalism'. Used as an adjective, 'multicultural' refers to 'the social characteristics and problems of governance posed by any society in which different cultural communities live together and attempt to build a common life while retaining something of their "original" identity' (Hall 2000, 209). In this sense, then, 'multicultural' covers a broad range of social phenomena, all of which have to do

with the struggles and challenges faced by individual people and their societies when they attempt to live together in diversity. Meanwhile, when used as a noun, 'multiculturalism' refers to 'the strategies and policies adopted to manage and govern the problems of diversity which multicultural societies throw up' (Hall 2000, 209). So, then, it refers to how we respond to, or even attempt to solve, the struggles and challenges of living in a multicultural society.

Although the noun 'multiculturalism' is often used in the singular, including in the title of this book, it would be more accurate to use the plural 'multiculturalisms', since many different strategies, policies, models and theories have been proposed to explain how cultural diversity should be managed and governed. In the following chapters, the methods of normative political theory will be used to examine some of the most plausible candidates, focusing especially on the differences between them. To begin, though, it is worth emphasizing some features that different multicultural political theories share in common, which include the following four. First is a sense of trepidation about the homogenizing tendencies of democratic societies, as implied by the ideal of society as a 'melting pot' into which minorities are expected to assimilate. Second is an anxiety about the propensity of majorities to disregard the fears of minorities about the supposed neutrality and fairness of their shared institutions and procedures. Third is a concern to guard against the marginalization, exclusion and oppression of minority cultural communities. Fourth is a desire to enable members of minority groups to maintain their distinctive identities and practices.

As this list indicates, there is significant convergence amongst multicultural political theorists, aptly summarized by Bhikhu Parekh's (2000, 1) observation that all

multiculturalisms are 'united in resisting the wider society's homogenising or assimilationist thrust based on the belief that there is only one correct, true or normal way to understand or structure the relevant areas of life'. Beyond this shared baseline, however, there is as much disagreement as one would expect to find in any other ideology or political theory. Furthermore, there is another claim that is often attributed to multiculturalism - but which, in fact, is endorsed by very few multicultural political theorists.

This is moral relativism, the controversial thesis that moral standards are not universal, but are relative to particular groups or traditions. Perhaps not coincidentally, cultural differences feature prominently in an influential argument for moral relativism, which starts from the observations that different cultures have different beliefs about morality and that each culture thinks that its own beliefs are correct. From these, it infers that there is no absolute or universal truth about morality and that the moral beliefs of individuals are, in some sense, produced by their cultures. One of the things that makes moral relativism so tempting is a sense that it is both arrogant to judge other cultures and improper to apply one's own values and standards to the practices and beliefs of others. Although it is a thesis about morality, it is often recruited in support of political ends, especially to defend the claim that it would be wrong for people from one culture or society to impose its values on another - for example, by condemning its worldview or interfering with its practices. However, the belief that it is wrong to condemn or interfere with the values or practices of another culture does not follow from moral relativism itself. For if the truth of a moral standard or principle really is relative to its culture, as moral relativists insist, then it is not wrong to do these things, if doing so is consistent with the standards of one's own culture.

The widespread association of multiculturalism with moral relativism can perhaps be explained by the fact that the opposing view, moral universalism, is often thought to be connected to something opposed by all multiculturalists – namely, cultural assimilation. For example, the coercive techniques of assimilation introduced under European colonialism, such as the imposition of the language of the metropole or removing Indigenous children to residential schools, were often rationalized by a belief in the superiority of European values and civilization, a belief that was itself part of a universalist moral worldview. However, the connections between universalism and assimilation are more psychological than conceptual, since moral universalism alone cannot rationalize forced assimilation, and it must also be combined with a sense of certainty on the part of dominant groups about the correctness of their worldview, and a belief in their right to impose it unilaterally.

Furthermore, there are at least two ways in which moral relativism conflicts with some claims commonly endorsed by multiculturalists. First, to the extent that it understands cultures as self-contained wholes, relativism seems to exclude the possibility of mutual learning across cultural differences, as when people from different traditions engage in fruitful intercultural dialogue about morality and values. Indeed, if people cannot judge other cultures and their standards, then nor can they rationally evaluate their ideas and perspectives in order to learn from them. Second, relativism also closes off one important way in which people can exhibit an attitude of respect towards different cultural groups and traditions – namely, by taking their beliefs and practices seriously enough to criticize them. To illustrate this point, philosopher Bernard Williams recounted an anecdote relayed by a Spanish conquistador who travelled with Hernán Cortés to Mexico, and who

recorded the sense of horror his fellow soldiers shared upon discovering the Aztec practice of human sacrifice. Williams (1972, 25) thought it would have been 'absurd' to regard their reaction as 'merely parochial or self-righteous', arguing instead that it 'indicated something which their conduct did not always indicate, that they regarded the Indians as men rather than as wild animals'.

So, then, different multiculturalisms share an opposition to cultural assimilation, but do not necessarily endorse moral relativism. Another sense in which the politics and political theory of multiculturalism can be confusing has to do with the different kinds of groups that it focuses on. For instance, people who share similar tastes in music, clothing or sports might justifiably describe themselves as sharing a culture, and they are also a group, but multiculturalists typically do not regard them as a cultural group in the sense they deem relevant. Instead, and this book will follow their lead, they focus on differences of language, nationality and religion. Not only does this exclude differences of lifestyle, but it also means that differences of sexual orientation and gender identity, of social class, or ones relating to disability, do not fall under the purview of multiculturalism. This is stipulative and, admittedly, controversial, not least because some authors include many of these forms of diversity within their analyses of multiculturalism (e.g. Joppke 2017), and because others have developed theories which stress the similarities between them and those of language, nationality and religion (e.g. Young 1990; Galeotti 2002).

Probably the most controversial exclusion from the following chapters is a separate consideration of the place of race and racism in multicultural politics and political theory. Racism has clearly shaped real-world multiculturalism, in both the adjective and noun senses of the word. For instance, a defining feature of the



contemporary politics of diversity is Islamophobia, which racializes Muslims, supporting their exclusion as well as making them into targets of suspicion (Modood 2019a). Clearly, it would be impossible to understand the place of Muslims in European or North American society today without considering race. Going back further, racism was central to the history of the countries where multiculturalism is today contested and debated, some of which were founded directly on white supremacy, and all of whom have been moulded by the ongoing legacies of colonialism, itself a racist project. Furthermore, multicultural political theory is a branch of the Western tradition in political thought, which has its own shameful history of excluding people of colour from the status of full personhood (Mills 1997).

So, like many social and political problems confronting us today, the issues addressed by multicultural political theory cannot be easily disentangled from racism. However, there are two reasons for not focusing directly on race in the same way as I will focus on differences of language, nationality and religion. First, arguably at least, race is different from these categories for having hierarchy built into it. Sally Haslanger (2000) makes this point by arguing that races are social rather than biological categories, whereby people are racialized according to perceived physical traits like skin colour and body type, which play a role in justifying their social position as well as how they are viewed and treated. In suggesting that race is distinctive because hierarchy determines its meaning, I do not mean to deny that the social categories of language, nationality and religion also often mark distinctions of superiority and inferiority. Indeed, such dynamics will be a major topic of this book. However, national, religious and linguistic differences can readily be imagined separately from the hierarchies we interpret into them, and this is not

the case for race (for a conflicting view, see Jeffers 2019). Second, there is also a danger that treating anti-racism as part of a broader multicultural project will lead us to misdiagnose various social ills, since racism is the failure to acknowledge not just the value of another culture, but rather the humanity of those it victimizes. This point was made forcefully by Kwame Anthony Appiah (1997), who worried that, in the politics of race, talk of cultural differences ‘obscures rather than illuminates’ because ‘[i]t is not black culture that the racist disdains, but blacks’.

Alongside these two reasons, one further point worth reiterating is that multicultural political theory is only one strand of political thinking, which must be complemented by other intellectual resources if it is to address complex real-world issues, including resources drawn from the philosophy and political theory of race. The same point applies when it comes to considering the claims of Indigenous people, since any satisfactory account of what justice requires for them will require a reckoning with settler colonialism, a form of political rule based on the seizure and exploitation of territory and the attempted elimination of the original inhabitants, and legitimized by the assumed cultural and racial superiority of Europeans (Wolfe 1999).

Narrowing the focus in the way I propose still leaves a wide range of phenomena. To help make sense of the remaining terrain, Canadian philosopher Will Kymlicka (1995, 11–32), whose work will be examined in detail in [chapter 2](#), has proposed an influential framework that incorporates two distinctions: one between the different kinds of groups to have sought multicultural rights, and another between the different kinds of rights they have sought. The first distinction contrasts national minorities with immigrants. National minorities generally share a language, are geographically concentrated, have a special attachment to

a particular territory, and – most importantly – seek to govern themselves. Initially at least, Kymlicka also included Indigenous peoples in this category, implying that groups such as the Sami in Scandinavia, the First Nation and Inuit peoples in Canada, and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia are entitled to the same kinds of rights as, for example, the Québécois in Canada, the Catalans in Spain, and the Welsh in the United Kingdom. Kymlicka's grounds for amalgamating these groups into a single category is that, unlike immigrants, they were once self-governing communities, who were subsequently incorporated into another state as a result of conquest or colonization.

Meanwhile, immigrants share with these other groups a desire to resist assimilation, but they tend to be much more interested in gaining equal access to the institutions of majority society, as opposed to establishing institutions of their own. As a result, national minorities and immigrants tend to seek different kinds of rights, hence the second distinction Kymlicka draws, between self-government rights and what he calls polyethnic rights. Self-government rights are sought by national minorities, and they are rights to maintain separate political institutions for the purposes of exercising political power over a given territory, for instance in the context of a federal or devolved state. Meanwhile, Kymlicka thinks that immigrants are more interested in polyethnic rights, a rather amorphous category including things such as funding for cultural associations, schools and festivals, as well as exemptions from generally applicable laws. Polyethnic rights are not about maintaining a distinctive society, but instead have to do with establishing fair terms of integration (Kymlicka 1995, 113-15). Their main purpose, according to Kymlicka (1995, 31), is 'to help ethnic groups and religious minorities express their cultural particularity and pride

without it hampering their success in the economic and political institutions of the dominant society'. So, like self-government rights, they aim to protect cultural differences, but they do so without giving a group the right to control its own territory, institutions or community.

Kymlicka's overlapping distinctions between national minorities and immigrants, and between self-government rights and polyethnic rights, are a helpful starting point. However, this framework can also be misleading, so should be treated with caution. For one thing, some groups fall awkwardly between the two categories of national minorities and immigrants, including nomadic peoples like the Roma and Travellers in Europe, or religious groups who live apart from mainstream society, such as the Hutterites and Amish in North America. For another, Indigenous peoples are not identical with national minorities, and the two groups make different political demands and have different needs and interests. Furthermore, distinguishing self-government rights from polyethnic rights risks obscuring the fact that national minorities and immigrants often seek very similar things, including forms of recognition and support that fall well short of self-government. Similarly, as will be discussed in [chapter 7](#), it is not only national groups that have sought self-government rights, and some religious groups have called for them too, at least on a partial or limited basis. These groups have sought the transfer of jurisdictional authority to religious courts and tribunals over matters of family law, and for legal powers to enable them to run their own schools, charities and churches without interference.

Furthermore, the association that Kymlicka draws between immigrants and polyethnic rights is problematic in two different senses. First, some of his polyethnic rights are sought by people who are not immigrants. For example, as we shall see in [chapter 6](#), religious accommodations in

Europe have been sought by Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus and the members of diverse Christian denominations. Many of the members of these groups are neither immigrants themselves, nor even the children or grandchildren of immigrants. Consequently, either Kymlicka intends immigrants in a catch-all sense, to include everyone who is not included in his other categories, or he must think that religious accommodations for non-immigrants are in some sense different from those for immigrants, falling outside the ambit of multiculturalism. Both of these are implausible. Second, Kymlicka stipulates that the general rationale for the rather ramshackle bundle of policies he clumps together as polyethnic rights is to establish fair terms of integration. However, as will be demonstrated in [chapters 4, 6 and 8](#), a number of different justifications can be given for these measures, which, in addition to the subsidies and exemptions mentioned earlier, also include things as various as affirmative action programmes, supported employment schemes and other labour market interventions, the provision of interpretation and translation services for recent immigrants, and workplace accommodations. If these measures are best justified by appealing to a range of different values, principles and arguments, as I will suggest, and if people who are not immigrants might have a good claim to them, then this calls into question Kymlicka's rationale for gathering them together in the same category.

A final problem with Kymlicka's framework is that it underplays the significance of symbolic forms of recognition, which can be important for national groups as well as for ethnic and religious minorities, and which can play a crucial role in building trust, promoting inclusion and nurturing social ties. For example, a multicultural state might invite the representatives of different religions to participate in official state functions, it might recognize its

component nations in its flag and anthem, and its officials might apologize for the wrongful treatment of minority groups in the past. All of these things can be crucially important for the success of a multicultural society, but they are difficult to subsume under the headings of polyethnic or self-government rights.

In his subsequent work, Kymlicka has implicitly acknowledged some of these shortcomings, particularly that Indigenous peoples can have different interests from national minorities, that immigrants and national minorities sometimes seek the same policies, that immigrants are interested in their ancestral languages and cultures as well as integration, and that symbolic forms of recognition can be significant. For example, with Keith Banting he has developed a 'multicultural policy index', which identifies a list of measures sought by different kinds of groups (Banting et al. 2006, 56-62). This retains his favoured distinction between immigrant groups and national minorities, but separates out Indigenous peoples as a distinct group in their own right, with unique interests, especially regarding historical claims to land and sovereignty. Furthermore, it acknowledges that national minorities are interested in more than self-government rights; it recognizes the importance of political representation and symbolic/official affirmations for all three groups; and it appreciates that, alongside integration, immigrants are also often interested in retaining ties to their countries of origin, for instance in the form of dual citizenship or language learning for children. Consequently, the index is a significant refinement of, and improvement upon, the framework Kymlicka initially presented in his *Multicultural Citizenship* (1995). However, it still places a great deal of weight on how cultural minorities were incorporated into the state, and this could give rise to the misleading impression that multicultural political theory is

basically composed of three discrete domains of enquiry, concerning, respectively, the rights of immigrants, of national minorities, and of Indigenous peoples. But this would obscure the fact that many of the arguments which can be harnessed in support of rights for one of these groups carry over to the situation of the others.

Consequently, instead of sticking rigidly to Kymlicka's distinctions, this book will sketch an alternative map of multicultural political theory, organized around the three main modes of cultural diversity addressed by multiculturalism, which are differences of language, nationality and religion. Two points in particular are worth emphasizing about this approach. First, in prioritizing the mode of diversity, it places less emphasis than does Kymlicka's framework on whether a measure is sought by a national minority or by immigrants. As such, it implies that when we consider how democratic states should deal with linguistic diversity, as we will do in [chapter 8](#), we should discuss immigrant languages in tandem with long-established ones, rather than assuming that these are separate domains of inquiry. This does not preclude coming to the conclusion that only national minorities, and not immigrants, are entitled to have their languages publicly recognized and supported, but it does insist that this conclusion must be argued for, and is not a premise to be assumed, as Kymlicka's framework risks implying. Second, granting priority to the categories of language, nationality and religion does not mean that arguments appropriate for one mode of diversity do not apply elsewhere. So, for instance, when we consider whether religious groups are entitled to institutional autonomy, so as to enable them to run their schools, charities and churches without much state interference - as we will do in [chapter 7](#) - we should freely draw upon arguments that have been given for other religious accommodations, as well as arguments that have

been proposed concerning the political autonomy of national minorities.

In addition to avoiding some of the pitfalls that Kymlicka's approach encounters, one further merit of this approach, I believe, is that it better reflects how the political theory of multiculturalism has evolved in recent years. As we shall see in [chapters 2](#) and [3](#), the major works that continue to define the field - represented here by the writings of Will Kymlicka, Chandran Kukathas, Charles Taylor and Bhikhu Parekh - were comprehensive theories of multiculturalism, with applications across a wide range of issues. Admittedly, some of these spoke more directly to the local preoccupations of their authors, such as the claims of francophone Canadians for Taylor and Kymlicka, and postcolonial immigration in Britain for Parekh. Nevertheless, they supplied general normative principles that could apply to a range of societies and a number of different modes of cultural diversity. Meanwhile, recent work on multiculturalism has tended to be narrower and more focused, concerned with particular issues, such as language rights, religious accommodation or national autonomy. Although this work often draws on theoretical innovations that can be traced to the pioneering work of Kymlicka, Kukathas, Taylor and Parekh, it tends to be less interested in building general theories and more concerned to answer particular puzzles. As a result, multicultural political theory today is increasingly fragmented, up to the point where one might doubt its continuing relevance, at least as a coherent school of thought. In this book I hope to allay that doubt, by drawing attention to the ways in which these apparently separate debates can learn from one another.

## Plan



As mentioned already, many of the defining features of multicultural political theory can be traced back to a series of texts produced in the 1990s and the early 2000s. Accordingly, the next two chapters will introduce and assess four leading theories that emerged during this period. These texts were selected both because they reflect the breadth of multicultural political theory, and because each of them continues to shape contemporary responses to cultural diversity.

[Chapter 2](#) concentrates on liberal responses to multiculturalism and seeks to tease out the enduring influence of some ideas drawn from liberalism's early and recent histories. One of these is state neutrality, which initially applied only to religious matters, as reflected in the recommendation to keep church and state separate, but is now sometimes extended as a more general principle of ethnocultural neutrality. The two authors we concentrate on disagree about this extension. The first, Will Kymlicka, argues against it, pointing out that contemporary democratic states already promote the culture of the majority, often unintentionally, such as by using its language, marking its festivals and teaching its literature and history in schools. As a result, members of minority cultures are entitled to seek supports for their own languages, practices and traditions, both to protect them against assimilation and to give them what the majority already gets without asking. Furthermore, Kymlicka provides a powerful philosophical justification for supporting minority cultures in this way, which begins from another idea with a long history in the liberal tradition - namely, that all human beings have an interest in living autonomously. Amongst other things, this means being able to choose and carry out one's own plan of life, selecting goals for oneself and pursuing self-chosen projects, without being directed from the outside. In Kymlicka's hands, this

interest provides the basis for a novel argument for minority cultural rights, supported by a connection he draws between culture and autonomy, which says that only against the backdrop of a stable cultural context are people able to make meaningful choices about how to lead their lives. The upshot of this argument is that, in order to protect individual autonomy, minority cultures should sometimes be granted special rights, to enable their members to preserve their distinctive culture and to protect themselves against the homogenizing pressures of majority society.

The second liberal philosopher examined in [chapter 2](#), Chandran Kukathas, argues against these rights and in support of a rigorous form of neutrality. He starts from the observation that autonomy is a far more contentious value than Kymlicka acknowledges, since it is not universally endorsed. Some traditional cultures do not recognize it, and, in any case, Kukathas thinks that a life which is less than fully autonomous can still have value and meaning. Furthermore, promoting autonomy, as Kymlicka recommends, will undermine many traditional ways of life, reshaping them to fit a mould congenial to the temperament of a modern Western liberal, but one that might seem strange and hostile to some minorities. Instead of autonomy, Kukathas believes that the most basic liberal value is toleration, which calls on us to refrain from interfering with other people's practices, traditions and cultures despite disapproving of them. Thus, he controversially argues for a form of multiculturalism that is maximally tolerant, including of practices such as female genital mutilation, ritual scarring and allowing parents to remove their children from school.

Some political theorists believe that liberalism is unable to address the challenges of cultural diversity adequately, and [chapter 3](#) turns to the work of political theorists who have

looked to the margins of liberal political theory, and beyond it, to develop new intellectual resources for responding to the challenges of cultural diversity. One of these is recognition, an idea especially associated with Charles Taylor, and the other is dialogue, a leitmotif of Bhikhu Parekh's innovative approach to multiculturalism.

According to Taylor's politics of recognition, achieving an equal and inclusive society will require both the state and its members to recognize and affirm differences of culture. Taylor particularly emphasizes the psychological harms that people are exposed to if their identities are misrecognized, or not recognized at all, as when a religious group is stigmatized or stereotyped in wider society, or when the state refuses to recognize the existence of a particular ethnic group. Although the policy proposals generated by his theory are broadly similar to Kymlicka's, Taylor puts much more emphasis on how the different groups in society perceive one another and on the damaging effects suffered by people through being allocated a subordinate social status.

As he presents it, Taylor's theory is a sympathetic critique of mainstream liberalism, and the effect of his theory is to enlarge liberalism by incorporating additional theoretical resources. Meanwhile, the other thinker discussed in this chapter, Parekh, recommends dispensing with liberalism altogether. According to him, liberalism is not only a political theory, but also a culturally specific worldview, bound up with a particular vision of human life.

Appreciation of the fact that liberalism is one worldview amongst others, he thinks, should prompt us to see the importance of stepping beyond it, if we are to manage cultural diversity fairly. One of Parekh's main proposals for achieving this is a distinctive model of intercultural dialogue, in which the representatives of different traditions listen to and learn from one another, with a view

to reaching a consensus about how to arrange society, its laws and its institutions. Unlike Kymlicka, Kukathas and Taylor, Parekh does not believe that political theorists themselves can appeal to first principles in order to settle controversial questions about whether particular cultural practices ought to be permitted, or about how institutions in culturally diverse societies should be designed. Instead, these matters must be settled by citizens, after a morally serious and inclusive dialogue.

The next two chapters consider the philosophical and political reception of multiculturalism. [Chapter 4](#) discusses the four most significant philosophical critiques of multiculturalism, two of which concern its egalitarian credentials, and another two its underlying conception of culture. The first egalitarian objection takes aim at the characteristically multicultural idea that people's rights and entitlements should be tied to their culture or identity. Against this, critics argue for a principle of uniform treatment, both on grounds of fairness and in order to discourage competition and conflict amongst social groups. Meanwhile, the other egalitarian objection focuses on the inequalities that arise within cultural groups, and is particularly concerned with the possibility that multiculturalism could be contrary to the interests of women and girls, because its favoured policies will end up supporting patriarchal cultures and practices.

The other two objections concern the philosophical foundations of multiculturalism. According to the essentialist critique, multiculturalism is wedded to an implausible conception of culture, which flattens out differences within cultures and exaggerates those between them. This critique poses a deep challenge since multiculturalists do not just happen to endorse a crude or simplistic conception of culture, but their positive recommendations for society seemingly depend upon such

a conception. Finally, the cosmopolitan critique suggests that multiculturalists exaggerate the significance of cultural ties for individuals, pointing out that people manage to construct meaningful lives by moving between different cultures and by drawing on different influences. Accordingly, cosmopolitans argue that multicultural arguments for cultural rights depend on flawed assumptions.

[Chapter 5](#) moves down a register and considers multiculturalism as a public policy orientation, as opposed to an abstract political theory. Taking the recent backlash against multiculturalism as a starting point, it examines the oft-made objection that multiculturalism undermines social cohesion and political stability. In fact, this objection comes in two different guises: sometimes as a claim about the common identity that binds the members of a political community together, and sometimes as a claim about shared values. Although multiculturalists can answer both challenges, they seem to have already lost the battle in the court of public opinion, at least in some European societies. As a result, two alternative public policy approaches have emerged, one insisting on robust civic integration programmes and another going under the title of interculturalism. Although proponents of both have often been passionate critics of multiculturalism, much of what they argue for can be incorporated within a multicultural approach, and indeed has already been called for by leading multicultural political theorists. Thus, I will argue that, at least in the short term, the effects of the backlash against multiculturalism have mostly been cosmetic.

The next three chapters concentrate on the three main forms of cultural diversity – differences of religion, nationality and language. The academic literatures addressing these have become increasingly separate from one another, which is unsurprising given how specialized

and fine-grained some of the discussions are. Nevertheless, I will attempt to draw attention to some important areas of overlap, and where scholars working on one issue have learned from debates about one of the others. Furthermore, a recurrent theme in these chapters is the way in which the first generation of multicultural political theory continues to exert a powerful force, influencing – but perhaps also constraining – how political theorists today understand the challenges of religious, national and linguistic diversity.

[Chapter 6](#) examines how two themes from the classical multicultural texts – toleration and recognition – continue to shape discussions amongst liberals and their critics about how democratic societies should accommodate religious diversity. The first half of this chapter concentrates on debates amongst liberal political theorists about religious accommodations, as when laws or employment practices are adjusted in response to religious differences. A difficult challenge for liberal theorists is to identify reasons for accommodating religious practices that do not unduly favour religious beliefs and commitments over non-religious ones, and the most promising solution to this puzzle, I shall suggest, appeals to the value of integrity.

Whilst liberals have been preoccupied with the question of whether particular and controversial practices should be tolerated, other multiculturalists have foregrounded the idea of recognition, exploring the ways in which it supports multicultural inclusion and belonging. In particular, they have criticized liberal political theorists for neglecting important contextual considerations, arguing that issues of religious accommodation should not be settled without paying close attention to the background structure of social relations, and especially inequalities of power and status. Consequently, the second half of the chapter considers two proposals that challenge orthodox liberal views: one for enhancing the public visibility of minority religious