

Political Ideas – Multiculturalism (non-core ideas)

Politics Edexcel and AQA – revision notes – based on Hodder Education revision guides

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- (1) The origins of multiculturalism.
- (2) The different types of multiculturalism.
- (3) Core ideas and principles.
- (4) Differing views and tensions.

(1) The origins of multiculturalism

The idea of multiculturalism is a modern one, developing in the late 20th century. While it is not strictly an ideology it provides an outlook at how society develops.

While most liberals agree that multiculturalism is a positive vision, most conservatives perceive it more negatively.

The above points ought to be contextualised particularly with regard to the decline of the nation-state, globalisation and dissemination of postmodernist ideas.

The milestones

- The decline of colonial empires and the aftermath of the Second World War have led to **mass movements** of peoples from different racial, ethnic and religious origins into western democracies.
- During the 1980s and 1990s, Canadian thinkers such as **Will Kymlicka** and **Charles Taylor** begin writing about **national identity and multiculturalism**. This perspective was galvanised by the question of **independence to Quebec**.
- This has raised some negative sentiments and marginalisation of some new immigrant groups.
- **Western democracies increasingly became multicultural** accompanied by movements that supported this change and were seeking to facilitate and entrench it.
- **Increased globalisation**, free movement and cheap travel accelerated the process of multiculturalism.

- While the process was and is welcomed by many, it nonetheless sparks tension between different communities.

(2) The different types of multiculturalism

2.1: Liberal multiculturalism.

2.2: Pluralist multiculturalism.

2.3: Cosmopolitan multiculturalism.

2.1: Liberal multiculturalism

In this perspective, freedom is perceived to be about self-determination and self-realisation.

- All liberals embrace the concept of tolerance as a key element within their belief system = society should tolerate, accept, a wide range of ideas, beliefs, religions, ethnicity, lifestyles, etc by different communities. Neither group is superior or inferior to another, and no group should be marginalised or discriminated against. Thus, protection of ethnic minorities, diversity, equality before the law.
- Classical liberals, like Mill, argued that liberty and democracy are developmental processes that continue to evolve. Modern liberals consider multiculturalism and diversity as a natural positive development in this process.
- Charles Taylor argued that there are universal social values that are applicable in all circumstances regardless of sociodemographic and cultural attributes.
- Will Kymlicka suggests that society and the state have to offer group-differentiated rights = rights that might be granted to some groups albeit they are not universally applied. In its extreme form, such rights may grant the group with the possibility of self-governing itself.

Key thinkers

Charles Taylor (1931--)

Key work: *Multiculturalism and the Politics of recognition* (1994)

Key concepts and ideas

- A Canadian liberal thinker that like others was influenced by the controversy surrounding the identity of the French-speaking minority in Quebec.
- His views are often regarded as communitarianism; suggesting that human nature is essentially social and cooperative, and we seek our identity primarily based on our community rather than as individuals.
- Our sense of identity is anchored in our social relationships and ties to the community, the family, religion, occupation and pastimes.

- Politics is leaning towards the idea of a 'national culture' in comparison to human beings leaning towards narrower frames of reference such as their immediate community.
- States and policy makers should account for how people shape their identity and the broad range of diverse identities.

Key quotation

"[M]y discovering my own identity doesn't mean that I work it out in isolation, but that I negotiate it through dialogue, partly overt, partly internal, with others."

Will Kymlicka (1962--)

Key work: *Multicultural Citizenship* (1995)

Key concepts and ideas

- A Canadian thinker that is in essence a modern liberal.
- Key liberal values are always applicable across different societies and communities.
- The individual attachment to a specific culture is a positive development, especially as a supporting force of individualism. These two factors are not antagonist but rather they complement one another.
- Cultural choice is important and healthy for individuals and communities.
- Developed the idea of group-differentiated rights.

Key quotation

"The state does not oppose the freedom of people to express their particular cultural concerns, but nor does it nurture such expression ... rather it responds with benign neglect."

Links and contradictions between liberalism and multiculturalism

- Liberalism is rooted in tolerance that is essential for diversity; multiculturalism argues that some cultures are fundamentally intolerant of liberal ideology.
- Liberals believe that multiculturalism encourages individualism; multiculturalism asserts that ideas of collective communities and identity can be seen as a denial of individualism.
- Liberals suggest that some values are always fundamental to all societies = kind of an absolute morality; multiculturalism suggests a degree of 'moral relativism' implying that some communities may have belief systems which contradict liberal values but they nonetheless need to be respected and tolerated.
- Liberals consider all basic values to be characterised by equal value; multiculturalism advocates that some communities may attach different priorities to different values.

- Liberals tend to agree a distinction between private and public morality so equal rights, anti-discrimination, democracy and religious freedom can be imposed through society that is multicultural. Multiculturalism advocates that some communities are not accepting this distinction and thus can be free to reject some liberal principles even if they are widely socially acceptable.

2.2: Pluralist multiculturalism

- The idea of pluralist multiculturalism developed before multiculturalism was coined as a distinct term.
- **Isaiah Berlin**, for example, discussed '**value pluralism**' and coexistence of cultures that was called the '**politics of indifference**'.

Key thinkers

Isaiah Berlin (1909-1997)

Key work: *Two Concepts of Liberty* (1958)

Key concepts and ideas

- One of the most influential liberal thinkers in the 20th century. He enjoys a consensus over his analysis of liberalism as an ideology.
- A modern liberal in essence.
- **Value pluralism** = liberal views in society do not possess higher moral authority over non-liberal beliefs, thus the state and society must move beyond shallow diversity.
- Only in a liberal society that respects liberty, we can value pluralism.
- **Moral pluralism** = some moral values are common to all communities, such as liberty and equality while other moral values are not commonly shared.
- Sometimes a specific value such as equality, may be in conflict with another value such as freedom. If they are of equal worth it is impossible to prioritise one at the expense of the other. While he acknowledged such conflicts, he rejected the idea that the state needs to resolve this conflict by law because it would be coercive and undemocratic. Instead, the individual needs to resolve and balance these conflicts in its own way = value pluralism.
- Consequently, individuals must be free to 'leave' one community and attach to another that is more suitable to align successfully with their identity.
- That is, of course, easily said than done, because from a legal point of view, it is almost impossible to balance contradictory values. And individuals don't always wish to leave their community and may strive to change the balance of values within the community they live in. The 'Paradox of Democracy' is a case in question.

Key quotation

“Few things have done more harm than the belief on the part of individuals or groups (or tribes, or states, or nations, or churches) that he or she or they are in sole possession of the truth: especially about how to live, what to be and do – and that those who differ from them are not merely mistaken, but wicked or mad: and need restraining or suppressing.”

- Pluralist multiculturalism has drawn its ideas from Berlin by arguing that to the extent that liberal values are not morally superior they can be considered an obligatory ideology.

This orientation is associated with the British politician **Bhikhu Parekh** from the Labour party.

- An emphasis on globalisation as a reality of the modern world.
- There is a broad range of value systems, some religious, some political or ideological and others are nationalistic, particularistic or tribal.
- Regardless of the question whether it is justified to impose a liberal value system on other systems, such attempt is futile and bound to fail.
- This insight should guide policy making.
- The attempt to impose liberal values in a pluralist world is a source of amplifying conflicts all over the world and it is threatening stability.

Bhikhu Parekh (1935--)

Key work: *Rethinking Multiculturalism* (2000)

Key concepts and ideas

- Rejection of universalist liberalism = the individual needs to be culturally embedded.
- Justification for minority rights and deep diversity = cross-cultural dialogue can mitigate conflicts between the mainstream and minority cultures, creating common citizenship.
- While most liberals advocate ‘shallow diversity’, his ideas tend to be considered as ‘deep diversity’ and as a ‘community of communities’.
- The attempt to create a single value system is futile and dangerous.
- Different legal systems can coexist, for example, the Islamic Sharia law, can, with some restrictions, coexist with the UK national law.
- He argued that it is possible for an individual to be a loyal citizen of the state and simultaneously, a committed member of a separated cultural identity group.
- Every culture has positive and negative features that need to be recognised by the state.

Key quotation

“Multiculturalism is about the proper terms of relationship between different cultural communities. The norms governing their respective claims, including the principles of justice, cannot be derived from one culture alone but through an open and equal dialogue between them.”

2.3: Cosmopolitan multiculturalism

In the modern globalist world people are individuals and different cultures can coexist.

- **Cosmopolitan integration** = integration should not be restricted to a single society or state but should exist across borders internationally. Tolerance and mutual respect are universal, and individuals can choose which cultural community they identify with and can even identify with several cultures and identities. This is similar to postmodernist arguments.
- These intertwined identities can fluctuate.
- There should be no contradiction between such affiliations, and they should not be deep and strong as to threaten their coexistence.
- Thus, an individual may be Asian, a member of the church and gay.
- The shift of people from one culture and identity to another is sometimes called **‘cultural tourism’**.

Links and contradictions between multiculturalism and conservatism

There are several links of multiculturalism with conservatism, some can be seen as positive while others as negative:

Conservative negative views of multiculturalism

- Excessive diversity is a threat to an organic society, social cohesion and stability.
- Advocates tradition and traditional institutions.
- They fear state interference to protect multiculturalism can increase the state’s power and would lead to interference in other domains such as the economy.

Positive views of multiculturalism

- **‘Reform to conserve’** is a fundamental tenet in conservatism, and as such promoting certain changes can enhance cohesion rather than spark tensions.
- British multicultural society became a feature of the society and has been integrated into the fabric of sociocultural life.
- Strong and active local communities can be based on minority cultures, even **Burke** recognised its positive value and called them **‘little platoons’** (family, church and local communities)

- This idea is linked with **Tariq Modood** who believes that the strength of British society lies in the diversity of its local communities and their **coexistence**, a feature of a vibrant and dynamic society.

Key thinker

Tariq Modood (1952--)

Key work: *Multiculturalism* (2007)

Key concepts and ideas

- A British-Asian academic that served as an advisor to UK governments on issues of racial integration and multiculturalism.
- **Strong cultural identities** = a positive, they create dynamic vibrancy in the sociocultural life, and a national narrative is born out of the debate between cultures.
- **All four views of integration** = assimilation, individualist, multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism may be valid in their own way, to the extent that it is the preferred free choice of the individual or the group in question, rather than an imposition by the state or society.
- His ideas are described as **'unity within diversity'**.
- Each cultural identity has its own strengths, and this acknowledgment can enrich society and shape unity: faith schools, and state's legal protection of faith and ethnic groups.
- Cultural diversity and tolerance are a feature of British society; while 'British culture' still exists, it is enriched by vibrant local communities.
- His ideas are similar to **David Cameron's 'Big Society'**.

Key quotation

Equality is "not having to hide or apologise for one's origins, family or community but requiring others to show respect for them, and adapt public attitudes and arrangements so that the heritage they represent is encouraged rather than contemptuously expect them to wither away".

Links and contradictions between multiculturalism and socialism

Negative socialist views of multiculturalism

- They consider the debate as a distraction from the salient conflict embedded in capitalism, class conflict, and the economic inequality it creates.
- Socialists criticised some minority groups, especially religious ones, for fostering their own system of exploitation, for example, of women from a lower caste.
- Some measures to improve the economic position of specific groups undermine the overall objective of eradicating inequality and establishing a just society.

Positive socialist views of multiculturalism

- Socialists are respectful of any idea that promotes equal rights, at the individual and collective level.
- Some minority groups suffer from entrenched economic deprivation and marginalisation, and socialist types of measures can improve this situation.
- Many socialists equate economic exploitation with racism, and reducing such exploitation means fighting against racism.

(3) Core ideas and principles

1. Politics of recognition

- Recognition relates to how cultural identities are categorised within a given society.
- Charles Taylor argued that 'non-recognition or misrecognition can inflict harm': Europeans maintained the image of people of African heritage negatively and as inferior.
- Multiculturalism believes that the state needs to impose formal equality = similar to foundational equality, formal equality is a broader concept that includes equality under the law and the principle that every individual is entitled to equal treatment in society. Thus, it covers issues such as equality of opportunity and the elimination of sociological attributes such as gender or class from the discourse on inequality.

2. Culture and identity

- Identity politics = refers to the aspiration of the state to regard individuals in terms of their multiple identities and policy choices should reflect and protect such diversity.
- Identity as a social construct with individuals free to choose and change theirs.

3. Minority rights

- Minority rights = the need of specific communities to guarantee protection within a multicultural society of the values and practices that are essential for their identity as a culture.
- It is reflected in what Will Kymlicka called group-differentiated rights, as long as these rights do not harm others nor interfere with the rights of other groups.
- He made a distinction between three types of differentiated rights:
 - 1) Representative rights = to increase greater access and opportunities for long-standing deprivation; affirmative action, positive discrimination.
 - 2) Polytechnic rights = the state assists immigrant groups to maintain their cultural rights.

3) **Self-governing rights** = towards minorities and indigenous people if they were historically disadvantaged, but only when this is what the group wants and to the extent that it is practical.

- Minority rights face criticism:

1) Liberal rights: members of the majority culture may oppose minority groups with cultural practices that are perceived to **restrict individual freedoms**; for example, the Swiss ban on Muslim women wearing the burqa.

2) Positive discrimination: can be counterproductive as it promotes the idea that access to opportunities cannot be achieved by the individual. It is also in opposition to the liberal idea of **meritocracy**.

3) Isolation of minority rights: minority rights can encourage **segregation** with groups focusing on the preservation of their values and practices and live in their own enclave separated from mainstream culture.

4. Diversity

- Globalisation, international migration and travel transformed societies that became increasingly diverse whether they like it or not.
- Capital cities in Europe are especially diverse.
- The USA is a multicultural society and its indigenous population, native Americans, is a minority group within a society that is composed of every possible group.
- How the state ought to deal with such diversity differs across different multicultural perspectives.
- Will Kymlicka advocates '**shallow diversity**' which maintains that national values of the dominant/mainstream culture should be preserved and the minority cultures need to adapt. Bhikhu Parekh advocates '**deep diversity**', one that is characterised by the values of all communities being granted equal status.

(4) Differing views and tensions

While multiculturalism can be seen as a single movement it is characterised by significant tensions and divisions.

The division between shallow and deep diversity is a key challenge, in addition to other trends that are embedded in the movement.

Deep diversity = the belief that all groups of society should enjoy equal treatment.

Shallow diversity = the belief that the dominant mainstream culture should take priority, and other cultures need to adapt and conform accordingly.

Deep diversity is associated with Bhikhu Parekh and Charles Taylor; shallow diversity is associated with Will Kymlicka and Tariq Modood.

- Deep diversity advocates equal treatment to all communities including changing laws to reflect and accommodate their practices known as individualistic integration; shallow diversity argues that the dominant culture must preserve its domination and minority groups must conform.
- Deep diversity supports identity politics; shallow diversity supports universalism that must be adhered to by all groups regardless of their specific identities.
- Deep diversity advocates to allow laws and practices of minority communities to coexist alongside national laws if possible; shallow diversity argues that all laws and practices must conform with the national ones.
- Deep diversity encourages cultural development; shallow diversity argues that while diversity is celebrated it is subordinate to the national cultures and values.
- Deep diversity argues that social cohesion can be achieved through dialogue 'dynamic multiculturalism'; shallow diversity argues that the state needs to promote social cohesion.

Contemporary challenges facing multiculturalism

- 1) Massive movement of refugees, asylum seekers and economic migration.
- 2) Increased appeal and support for right-wing populist parties that challenge multiculturalism and advocate integration and assimilation; leading also to some countries banning some religious practices in France and Switzerland, and attacks on the exclusivity of faith schools in the UK.
- 3) The rise of Jihadist extremism; radicalisation.
- 4) Especially in the UK, multiculturalism is accused of being the reason for increased segregation and 'ghettoisation' of some groups in some cities, undermining dialogue and tolerance on all sides.
- 5) Despite these challenges multiculturalism is a potent force in many liberal democratic societies and is considered to be the main counter vector of increased right-wing extremist politics.