Notes on ‘Multiculturalism Citizenship’ by Will Kymlicka

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Anne-Marie Motard
‘Multicultural Citizenship’
Will Kymlicka, 1995

‘Is Multiculturalism Dead?’
Christian Joppke, 2017
‘A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights’

• What’s liberalism?
• Liberalism and diversity
• Late 20th century: ‘age of migration’ and ‘age of nationalism’
• Individual liberty, individual rights, human rights
• Majority rule vs minority rights?
How to reconcile individual rights and minority rights?

- Multiculturalism, a democratic conundrum

- Two types of cultural diversity:
  1) ‘National minorities’
  2) ‘Ethnic groups’
Three forms of group-differentiated rights:

• ‘Self-government rights’
• ‘Polyethnic rights’
• ‘Special representation rights’
John Stuart Mill:

• “Mill insisted that it was undeniably better for a Scottish Highlander to be part of Great Britain, or for a Basque to be part of France, ‘than sulk on his own rocks, the half-salvage relic of past times, revolving in his own little mental orbit, without participation or interest in the general movement of the world’” (Considerations on Representative Government, 1861).
Kymlicka: “I will show that minority rights are not only consistent with individual freedom, but can actually promote it.”

• “…liberals should recognize the importance of people’s membership in their own societal culture, because of the role it plays in enabling meaningful individual choice and in supporting self-identity.”
Kymlicka: “There is no single formula for deciding exactly which rights should be accorded to which groups.”

• “…many important areas of conflict can only be resolved on a case-by-case basis, in the light of the particular history of the group, its status in the larger society, and the choices and circumstances of its members. In short, they must be resolved politically, by good-faith negotiations and the give and take of democratic politics.”

• Democracy involves a commitment to the principle of political equality, but there is no way to deduce the single best system of representation from that abstract principle.”
Kymlicka: “Toleration and its limits”

Two fundamental limitations on minority rights:

• Absence of “internal restrictions”:
• “External protection”:

“A liberal view requires freedom within the minority group, and equality between the minority and majority group.”
Kymlicka: “Is Liberalism Sectarian?”

• “There are real conflicts between liberal principles and the demands of non-liberal groups, and we need to face these conflicts openly.”

• “The legitimacy of imposing liberal principles on illiberal national groups depends on a number of factors. The question of how two cultures, or two countries, should resolve differences of fundamental principle is a very complicated one…”
Kymlicka: “The Ties That Bind”

• “The claim that differentiated citizenship is a contradiction in terms is overstated. If differentiated citizenship is defined as the adoption of group-specific polyethnic, representation or self-government rights, then virtually every modern democracy recognizes some form of it.”

• “Without such measures, talk of ‘treating people as individuals’ is itself just a cover for ethnic and national injustice.”
Bhikhu Parekh:


“…making Britain a confident and vibrant multicultural society at ease with its rich diversity.”
Parekh Report:

• “Britain is both a community of citizens and a community of communities, both a liberal and a multicultural society, and needs to reconcile their sometimes conflicting requirements.”

• “Equality must be defined in a culturally sensitive way and applied in a discriminating but not discriminatory manner.”

• “Human rights principles provide a valuable framework for handling differences, but they are never by themselves enough.”
Multiculturalism and liberalism, an ongoing debate...