



Rethinking Multiculturalism: Cultural Diversity and Political Theory

By Bhikhu Parekh

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Bhikhu Parekh argues for a pluralist perspective on cultural diversity. Writing from both within the liberal tradition and outside of it as a critic, he challenges what he calls the "moral monism" of much of traditional moral philosophy, including contemporary liberalism--its tendency to assert that only one way of life or set of values is worthwhile and to dismiss the rest as misguided or false. He defends his pluralist perspective both at the level of theory and in subtle nuanced analyses of recent controversies. Thus, he offers careful and clear accounts of why cultural differences should be respected and publicly affirmed, why the separation of church and state cannot be used to justify the separation of religion and politics, and why the initial critique of Salman Rushdie (before a Fatwa threatened his life) deserved more serious attention than it received.

Rejecting naturalism, which posits that humans have a relatively fixed nature and that culture is an incidental, and "culturalism," which posits that they are socially and culturally constructed with only a minimal set of features in common, he argues for a dialogic interplay between human commonalities and cultural differences. This will allow, Parekh argues, genuinely balanced and thoughtful compromises on even the most controversial cultural issues in the new multicultural world in which we live.

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Editorial Review

Review

Parekh is fair, thoughtful, fastidious and inventive in his theorizing of multiculturalism, but his viewpoint is rooted in an attempt to understand and convey a non-Western outlook. While his approach is always balanced, his first impulse is to explain and, where defensible, defend viewpoints that Western liberals have traditionally found suspect. It is a strength of this work that Parekh not only develops a brilliantly conceived theory of multiculturalism, but applies that theory meaningfully to thorny policy questions. This is a truly important and original book. (Benjamin Barber, Director, Walt Whitman Center, Rutgers)

This book is a lucid and luminous examination of the lives and times of liberalism in the context of multiculturalism, migration, and cultural displacement. Over the years, Bhikhu Parekh's writings have been the source of sanity and wisdom on cultural rights and community relations. This work by a fine scholar and an ardent activist teaches the hard lessons of tolerance and cultural empathy. (Homi Bhabha, University of Chicago)

Parekh's book is the most comprehensive defense of a pluralist perspective on cultural diversity that has been offered so far. Parekh challenges the continuing legacy of moral monism in contemporary liberalism. He defends his own thoroughly ecumenical approach both at the level of theory and by responding to the controversies over practices like polygamy or the burning of Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*. Parekh's pluralism is far from a permissive attitude of anything goes. He rigorously defends the need for operative public values as well as for a radical critique of dominant cultures. The book displays all the wisdom and the fighting spirit of a man who has been at the forefront of the theoretical and political battles over multiculturalism. (Rainer Baubock, Institute of Advanced Study, Vienna)

Bhikhu Parekh's *Rethinking Multiculturalism* is a very rich book...One of the things which makes the book so valuable is that it is written by a political theorist who has had hands-on experience of the problems involved, and in more than one country. Its author has a lively sense of the immense range of situations, and the variety of problems, tensions and conflicts. (Charles Taylor *Times Literary Supplement*)

Reading Parekh, one is always led to think freshly about the matter at hand and to consider questions that had not been visible before. All of these virtues are on display here, but this book goes even further. It achieves a level of theoretical coherence and a depth of insight that is rare and impressive. This is a wonderful book. It will challenge, stimulate, and enrich all those who encounter it. (Joseph H. Carens *International Migration Review*)

Parekh offers much that is fresh and original both in his critical review of political philosophers on cultural pluralism, and in his account of culture, human value, and the meaning of justice and equality in a multicultural society...Parekh's style and tone exemplifies the dialogic attitude whose importance he also theorizes substantively in the book. (Irish Marion Young *Ethnicities*)

Brilliantly argued, rigorous, acute in its theoretical insights and persuasive in its practical suggestions...Bhikhu Parekh has produced something very important here. *Rethinking Multiculturalism* is sophisticated but also accessible; it really does force the most skeptical to "rethink" a wide range of issues. (Stephen Howe *Independent*)

[*Rethinking Multiculturalism* is an] ambitious, engaging, and provocative analysis of the opportunities and challenges contemporary multiculturalism presents at the outset of the 21st century...[Bhiku Parekh offers] a nuanced examination of human nature, of cultural diversity, of the essence and structure of culture, of the importance for, and nature of, cross-cultural interaction, and of the reason why cultural diversity should not merely be accepted and accommodated, but appreciated as a positive value to be cherished and fostered. To accomplish this task requires, as Parekh repeatedly reminds his readers, an open and equal dialogue between mutually respectful cultural communities and the ability of the state or polity to reconcile the demands of political unity and cultural diversity. (Richard Connors *Journal of International Migration and Integration*)

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About the Author

Bhikhu Parekh is Professor of Political Theory at the University of Hull. He is chair of the Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain.

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