BHIKHU PAREKH

Rethinking Multiculturalism

Cultural Diversity and Political Theory

SECOND EDITION

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Rethinking Multiculturalism

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Second edition

Bhikhu Parekh

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For J.P.M.

Contents

Preface to the Second Edition

During the five years since the publication of this book, it has attracted both sympathetic and critical discussion. I have taken advantage of this second edition to add a new final chapter in which I respond to my critics and restate my basic concerns more clearly than I seem to have done originally. The rest of the text remains the same. This is not because I continue to endorse every opinion and argument in it – a claim no author with a modicum of intellectual honesty can make – but rather because my basic position, which is what really matters, remains substantially the same.

BHIKHU PAREKH

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I am deeply grateful to several good friends who very kindly read the first draft of this book and made most valuable comments. They are Michael Sandel, Homi Bhabha, David Miller, Will Kymlicka, Stuart Hall, Rainer Bauböck, Preston King, Tariq Modood, Peter Jones, Uday Mehta, Albert Weale and Jan Nederveen Pieterse. They read the text from different disciplinary and theoretical perspectives and made sure that I took full account of them. Michael Sandel has placed me under an additional debt, and I like to hope that the book measures up to his confidence in it.

The book was originally intended as a short introduction to multiculturalism and part of the excellent series edited by Peter Jones and Albert Weale. I am grateful to them from releasing me from that commitment and generously allowing it to be published independently. Steven Kennedy has borne with its slow progress with an exemplary blend of patience and pressure, and no author could have wished for a better editor. Michael Aronson at Harvard University Press was most encouraging and I am grateful to him for many valuable suggestions. I thank Amalendu Misra for his useful comments and irreplaceable help with the typing and other matters relating to the preparation of the text.

During the years that the book has been in gestation, I have had the good fortune of discussing many of its ideas with several friends and colleagues and benefiting from their comments. They include Joe Carens, Nathan Glazer, Charles Taylor, Ben Barber, Fred Dallmayr, Paul Thomas, Jim Tully, Terence Ball, Andrew Mason, John Stone, Steven Lukes, Luc Ferry, Seyla Benhabib, Leroy Rouner, Ashutosh Varshney, Ferran Requejo, Shlomo Avineri, Dan Avnon, Avner de Shalit, Pratap Mehta, Pierre Birnbaum, Alan Montefiore, Catherine Audard, Matthew Festenstein, Pravin Patel, Upendra Baxi, Joe McCarney, Thomas Pantham, Gurpreet Mahajan, Muhammed Anwar, Rajeev Bhargava, Sudipta Kaviraj, Noel O'Sullivan, Ashis Nandy, Dhirubhai Sheth, Sarah Spencer, Scott Appleby, and the late and much

missed Richard Ashcraft. Various chapters were tried out at international conferences or academic seminars in Cambridge, Oxford, London, Toronto, Montreal, Paris, Vienna, Harvard, Berkeley, Philadelphia, Barcelona, Madrid, Amsterdam, Berlin, Trinidad, Durban, Tokyo, Delhi, and Bombay. I thank the participants for their comments, and like to hope that they will find the book genuinely multicultural in its orientation and range of cultural sensibilities.

The book began just after I had completed three years as Vice-Chancellor of the University of Baroda, India and five as Deputy Chair of the Commission for Racial Equality, UK, and was both prompted and enriched by my experiences there. During the final phase of the book I was privileged to chair the Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain, an independent body set up to analyse the state of race relations in Britain and propose an agenda of action to help Britain and hopefully other European societies feel at ease with and profit from their cultural diversity. The experience of working with distinguished fellow commissioners drawn from different walks of life proved invaluable, and I thank them all for their shrewd insights into the practical dilemmas and creative tensions of multicultural society. I am also grateful to several scholars and activists who gave evidence to the Commission or participated in its seminars, especially Joe Raz, Anne Phillips, John Solomos, Ceri Peach, Steven Vertovec and Lord Lester.

I dedicate this book to a very dear friend without whose affection and commitment it would never have seen the light of the day.

BHIKHU PAREKH

Introduction

The last four decades of the twentieth century witnessed the emergence of a cluster of intellectual and political movements led by such diverse groups as the indigenous peoples, national minorities, ethno-cultural nations, old and new immigrants, feminists, gay men and lesbians, and the greens. They represent practices, life-styles, views and ways of life that are different from, disapproved of, and in varying degrees discouraged by the dominant culture of the wider society. Although they are too disparate to share a common philosophical and political agenda, they are all 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 and structure the relevant areas of life. In their own different ways they want society to recognize the legitimacy of their differences, especially those that in their view are not incidental and trivial but spring from and constitute their identities. Although the term identity is sometimes inflated to cover almost everything that characterizes an individual or a group, most advocates of these movements use it to refer to those chosen or inherited characteristics that define them as certain kinds of persons or groups and form an integral part of their self-understanding. These movements thus form part of the wider struggle for recognition of identity and difference or, more accurately, of identity-related differences.

Their demand for recognition goes far beyond the familiar plea for toleration, for the latter implies conceding the validity of society's disapproval and relying on its self-restraint. Rather they ask for the acceptance, respect and even public affirmation of their differences. Some of these groups want the wider society to treat them equally with the rest and not to discriminate against or otherwise disadvantage them. Some go further and demand that it should also respect their differences; that is, view them not as pathological deviations to be accepted grudgingly but as equally valid or worthy ways of organizing the relevant areas

of life or leading individual and collective lives. While acceptance of differences calls for changes in the legal arrangements of society, respect for them requires changes in its attitudes and ways of thought as well. Some leaders of the new movements go yet further and press for public affirmation of their differences by symbolic and other means.

In the eyes of their champions, these and related demands represent a struggle for freedom, self-determination and dignity and against contingent, ideologically biased and oppressive views and practices claiming false objectivity and universal validity. For their critics the demands represent moral and cultural laissez-faire, a relativist rejection of all norms and concern for truth, a shallow, self-indulgent and ultimately self-defeating celebration of difference for its own sake; in short, the ethics and politics of the unregulated will. The debate between the two in their extreme as well as moderate forms constitutes the substance of the discourse surrounding the politics of recognition.

Although the politics of recognition has its own autonomous logic, it is also closely related to the older and more familiar politics of social justice or economic redistribution. The latter was never merely about redistribution and had an implicit or explicit cultural agenda. Classical socialism was not just about better economic opportunities for the poor and underprivileged but also about creating a new culture and new forms of social relations. Marxism attacked capitalism in the name of a new civilization based on the kind of universalist identity represented by the proletariat. Although the new movements spearheading the politics of recognition sometimes appear to be exclusively preoccupied with the issues of identity and difference, their more articulate spokesmen appreciate that the latter cannot be dissociated from the wider economic and political structure. Identities are valued or devalued because of the place of their bearers in the prevailing structure of power, and their revaluation entails corresponding changes in the latter. Women, gays, cultural minorities and others cannot express and realize their identities without the necessary freedom of self-determination, a climate conducive to diversity, material resources and opportunities, suitable legal arrangements, and so on, and all these call for profound changes in all areas of life.

Although these new movements are sometimes subsumed under the capacious term multiculuralism, the latter in fact refers to only some of them. Multiculturalism is not about difference and identity *per se* but about those that are embedded in and sustained by culture; that is, a body of beliefs and practices in terms of which a group of people

understand themselves and the world and organize their individual and collective lives. Unlike differences that spring from individual choices, culturally derived differences carry a measure of authority and are patterned and structured by virtue of being embedded in a shared and historically inherited system of meaning and significance. To highlight this distinction between the two kinds of differences, I shall use the term diversity to refer to culturally derived differences. Multiculturalism, then, is about cultural diversity or culturally embedded differences. Since it is possible to welcome other kinds of differences but not those derived from culture, or vice versa, not all advocates of the politics of recognition need be or, as a matter of historical fact, are sympathetic to multiculturalism. Although part of the politics of recognition, multiculuralism is a distinct movement maintaining an ambivalent relationship to it.[1]

Cultural diversity in modern society takes many forms of which three are most common.[2] First, although its members share a broadly common culture, some of them either entertain different beliefs and practices concerning particular areas of life or evolve relatively distinct ways of life of their own. Gays, Lesbians, those following unconventional lifestyles or family structures, and so on belong to the first category, and miners, fishermen, jet-set transnational executives, artists and others to the latter.[3] They all broadly share their society's dominant system of meaning and values and seek to carve out within it spaces for their divergent lifestyles. They do not represent an alternative culture but seek to pluralize the existing one. For convenience I shall call it subcultural diversity.

Second, some members of society are highly critical of some of the central principles or values of the prevailing culture and seek to reconstitute it along appropriate lines. Feminists attack its deeply ingrained patriarchal bias, religious people its secular orientation, and environmentalists its anthropocentric and technocratic bias. These and other groups represent neither subcultures, for they often challenge the very basis of the existing culture, nor distinct cultural communities living by their values and views of the world, but intellectual perspectives on how the dominant culture should be reconstituted. I shall call this perspectival diversity.

Third, most modern societies also include several self-conscious and more or less well-organized communities entertaining and living by their own different systems of beliefs and practices. They include the newly arrived immigrants, such long-established communities as Jews, Gypsies and the Amish, various religious communities, and such terri-

torially concentrated cultural groups as indigenous peoples, the Basques, the Catalans, the Scots, the Welsh and the Quebecois. I shall call this communal diversity.

Although these three kinds of diversity share several common features and sometimes overlap in practice, they differ in important respects. Subcultural diversity is embedded in a shared culture which it wishes to open up and diversify and not replace with another. This does not mean that it is shallower or more easy to accommodate than other types of diversity. Single-sex marriages, cohabitation and gay parenting deeply offend and often provoke strong reactions among many members of society. However, their challenge is limited in scope and is articulated in terms of such values as personal autonomy and choice that are derived from the dominant culture itself. Perspectival diversity represents a vision of life the dominant culture either rejects altogether or accepts in theory but ignores in practice. It is more radical and comprehensive than subcultural diversity and cannot be so easily accommodated. Communal diversity is quite different. It springs from and is sustained by a plurality of long-established communities, each with its own long history and way of life which it wishes to preserve and transmit. The diversity involved here is robust and tenacious, has well-organized social bearers, and is both easier and more difficult to accommodate depending on its depth and demands.[4]

The terms 'multicultural society' and 'multiculturalism' are generally used to refer to a society that exhibits all three and other kinds of diversity, one that displays the last two kinds, or to that characterized by only the third kind of diversity. Although all three usages have their advantages and disadvantages, the third has on balance most to be said for it, and that is how I shall generally use the term. Since the first two kinds of diversity are to be found in most societies throughout history, the first two usages are so wide as to deprive the term of focus and even render it useless. Furthermore, since communal diversity is logically distinct and raises questions that are unique to it, it constitutes a coherent and self-contained object of investigation, and deserves a name specific to it. Although feminism, gay liberation, environmentalism and so on overlap with it, their basic concerns are different.

Our narrow usage also has a historical basis for the terms 'multicultural' and 'multiculturalism' and the movement associated with them first appeared in countries which found themselves faced with distinct cultural groups. These societies had long assumed that they had a single national culture into which all their citizens should assimilate. They

now found that they included groups, either long-established or new arrivals, who would not or whom it could not assimilate and whose presence therefore faced them with new and unfamiliar challenges. As a nation of immigrants, the United States has long insisted on the 'swift assimilation of aliens' into the 'language and culture that has come down to us from the builders of this republic' as Theodore Roosevelt put it.[5] Dominated by the idea of a single American identity and culture that constituted the core of 'Americanism' or 'American creed', the country offered a 'great asylum for diverse peoples' but 'has not always been a great refuge for diverse cultures [which] … at best have been kept marginal to the mainstream'.[6] For reasons that do not concern us here, the black struggle in the United States took a cultural turn in the 1960s, and many of its leaders insisted on the maintenance and recognition of their culture, partly as an affirmation of their distinct ethnic identity, partly in the hope that this would counter the educational underachievement and low self-esteem of their children, and partly to build a political and ideological basis in their struggle against white racism. They were joined by Puerto Ricans, Mexican Americans, native peoples, some sections of non-European immigrants, and others, who all insisted on affirming their cultural identity, declaring America multicultural, and championing the cause of multiculturalism.

Australia officially declared itself multicultural and committed itself to multiculturalism in the early 1970s because of its increasing 'Asianization' and the presence of 'nonassimilable types'. This was also broadly the case in Canada. Israel began to see itself as multicultural in the late 1960s because the oriental and sephardic Jews began to demand revision of its hitherto dominant self-definition and national culture. 'Where is the pride of the sephardics?' was one of the popular slogans of Black Panthers, a militant group among them. In Britain the sizeable presence of South Asians and Afro-Caribbeans in the 1960s, and their refusal, especially of the former, to assimilate, placed multiculturalism on the public agenda. In Germany multiculturalism appeared on the national agenda with the arrival of large bodies of immigrants from Turkey and elsewhere who 'no longer want to be assimilated as far giving up their cultural identity is concerned, especially because more and more come from other cultural spheres' as a prominent German politician put it. In all these societies multiculturalism became a politically and ideologically significant movement because of its rejection of the assimilationist demand of the wider society.

A multicultural society, then, is one that includes two or more cultural communities. It might respond to its cultural diversity in one of two ways, each in turn capable of taking several forms. It might welcome and cherish it, make it central to its self-understanding, and respect the cultural demands of its constituent communities; or it might seek to assimilate these communities into its mainstream culture either wholly or substantially. In the first case it is multiculturalist and in the second monoculturalist in its orientation and ethos. Both alike are multicultural societies, but only one of them is multiculturalist. The term 'multicultural' refers to the fact of cultural diversity, the term 'multiculturalism' to a normative response to that fact.

The failure to distinguish between a multicultural and a multiculturalist society has often led to an agonized but largely unnecessary debate about how to describe a society. In Britain the ethnic minorities, made up of several distinct cultural communities, comprise just over 6 per cent of the population. Although the country is clearly multicultural, the conservative opinion has systematically resisted the description. In its view Britain has over the centuries evolved a distinct culture which is integrally tied up with its national identity and should continue to enjoy a privileged status. To call it multicultural is to imply that its traditional culture should not be given pride of place, that the minority cultures are equally central to its identity, that they should be respected and even cherished and not encouraged to disappear over time, and that the ethnic minorities consist not of individuals but of organized communities entitled to make collective claims. Since conservatives reject all this, they refuse to call Britain multicultural; by contrast many British liberals, who endorse most of these implications, have no hesitation in accepting that description.

France has roughly the same percentage of ethnic minority population as Britain, and its composition too is broadly similar. Not just the conservative but even the liberal opinion there refuses to call it a multicultural society. The French political tradition is based on a strong notion of citizenship. To be a French citizen is to be integrated by an act of will into the French nation and to enjoy the same rights and obligations as the rest. The tradition recognizes only the citizens and has no space for the concept of minority; citizens can be *in a minority* on this or that matter but not *a minority* with its connotation of an organized, exclusive and more or less permanent status. Furthermore, the French nation is supposed to embody and protect the French culture, which its citizens are expected to accept as a condition of their citizenship.

Indeed, since the values of the French culture are believed to be not peculiarly French but universal in their validity, France feels justified in requiring its 'minorities' to abide by them. In such a view minority cultures have no claim to public recognition let alone acceptance. For both conservatives and liberals, France is not a multicultural society.[7]

In both Britain and France the terminological dispute arises from the confusion referred to earlier. Both societies are multicultural in the sense defined earlier, and the disagreement is about how to respond to that fact, some preferring a multiculturalist and others an assimilationist or monoculturalist response. Their normative difference should not be allowed to influence the description of empirical reality. Rather than debate whether Britain, France or any other society is 'really' or 'truly' multicultural, we should acknowledge their multicultural character and discuss whether or not they should remain so.

Although contemporary multicultural societies are not historically unique, for many premodern societies also included several cultural communities, four important facts distinguish them from their predecessors. First, in premodern societies minority communities generally accepted their subordinate status and remained confined to the social and even the geographical spaces assigned them by the dominant groups. Although Turkey under the Ottoman Empire had fairly large Christian and Jewish communities and granted them far greater autonomy than do most contemporary western societies, it was not and never saw itself as a multicultural society. It was basically a Muslim society which happened to include non-Muslim minorities, called *dhimmis* or protected communities. It followed Islamic ideals and was run by Muslims who alone possessed the full rights of citizenship, the rest enjoying extensive cultural but few political rights. The cultural and political climate in contemporary multicultural societies is quite different. Thanks to the dynamics of the modern economy, their constituent communities cannot lead isolated lives and are caught up in a complex pattern of interaction with each other and the wider society. And thanks to the spread of liberal and democratic ideas, they refuse to accept inferior political status and demand equal political rights including the right to participate in and shape the cultural life of the wider society. For its part the wider society, too, concedes the legitimacy of some of these demands and goes at least some way towards meeting them.

Second, thanks to colonialism, slavery, the Holocaust, and the enormous suffering caused by the communist tyrannies, we realize better than before that moral dogmatism and the concommitant spirit of

aggressive self-righteousness not only lead to egregious violence but also blind us to its enormity and blunt our moral sensibility. Our understanding of the nature, sources and subtle forms of violence is deeper, and we appreciate that just as groups of people can be oppressed economically and politically, they can also be oppressed and humiliated culturally, that these and other forms of oppression reinforce each other, and that the concern for social justice needs to include not just economic but also cultural rights and well-being. Thanks further to the developments in the sociology of knowledge, psychoanalysis and cultural psychology, we appreciate better than before that culture deeply matters to people, that their self-esteem depends on others' recognition and respect, and that our tendency to mistake the cultural for the natural and to unwittingly universalize our beliefs and practices causes much harm and injustice to others. All this has led to a greater acceptance of cultural differences and a redefinition of the relation between politics and culture, making culture a politically relevant category and respect for an individual's culture an integral part of the principle of equal citizenship.

Third, contemporary multicultural societies are integrally bound up with the immensely complex process of economic and cultural globalization. Technology and goods travel freely, and they are not culturally neutral. Multinationals introduce new industries and systems of management and require the receiving societies to create the necessary cultural preconditions. World opinion demands subscription to the body of universal values embodied in the various statements on human rights, and imposes some degree of moral homogeneity. People travel for employment and as tourists, and both export and import new ideas and influences. Thanks to all this, no society can remain culturally self-contained and isolated. Indeed, the external influences are often so subtle and deep that the receiving societies are not even aware of their presence and impact. The idea of national culture makes little sense, and the project of cultural unification on which many past societies and all modern states have relied for their stability and cohesion is no longer viable today. Contemporary cultural diversity thus has an air of inexorability and unpredictability about it and confronts us as a shared universal predicament.

Fourth, contemporary multicultural societies have emerged against the background of several centuries of the culturally homogenising nation-state. In almost all premodern societies cultural communities were widely regarded as the bearers of collective rights and left free to follow their customs and practices. The modern state rested on a very

different view of social unity. It generally recognized only the individuals as the bearers of rights and sought to create a homogeneous legal space made up of uniform political units subject to the same body of laws and institutions. It set about dismantling long-established communities and reuniting the 'emancipated' individuals on the basis of a collectively accepted and centralized structure of authority. Since the state required cultural and social homogenization as its necessary basis, it has for centuries sought to mould the wider society in that direction. Thanks to this, we have become so accustomed to equating unity with homogeneity, and equality with uniformity, that unlike many of our premodern counterparts we feel morally and emotionally disorientated by, and do not quite know how to accommodate, the political demands of a deep and defiant diversity.

Although contemporary multicultural societies are not unique, their historical context, cultural background and patterns of interaction between their constitutive communities are. Not surprisingly they raise questions either not faced by earlier societies or at least not in their current forms, and call for new concepts or radical redefinitions of old ones.[8] The questions relate to cultural rights of minorities, the nature of collective rights, why cultures differ, whether their diversity is a transitional or permanent phenomenon, whether and why it is desirable, whether all cultures deserve equal respect, whether they should be judged in their own terms or ours or by universal standards and how the last can be derived, and whether and how we can communicate across and resolve deep differences between cultures. They also include questions about the state's relation to culture, such as whether it should ignore or give public recognition to its various cultures, and if the latter whether it should privilege the dominant culture or treat them all equally; whether equality involves neutrality or evenhandedness; how the state can both respect cultural diversity and ensure political unity; and how it should determine the range of permissible diversity. Just as the state in a class-divided society might institutionalize and legitimize the rule of the dominant class, it might in a culturally divided society enshrine the domination of one cultural community, raising the question whether and how this danger can be avoided.

Multicultural societies also raise questions about the nature and task of political theory. Almost all past political theorists took the entire humankind as their intended audience and claimed universal validity for their visions of the good life, models of political unity, theories of rights, justice, political obligation, equality and so on. Once we appre-

ciate that human beings are culturally embedded, that cultures differ greatly, and that the intended audience of political theory is not culturally homogeneous, such a view of its nature and task requires reconsideration. Even if the political theorist decided to confine himself to his own or his kind of society as John Rawls has done in his later writings, his problem would not end. He is located within and likely to be influenced by one of his society's several cultures, and his concepts, assumptions and answers might not carry conviction with those belonging to other cultural traditions, as Rawls's critics have shown to be the case with his political liberalism.

Since these and related questions are all in one form or another connected with culture, a theory of multicultural society cannot offer coherent answers to them without developing a well-considered theory of the nature, structure, inner dynamics and role of culture in human life. Much of traditional political theory either ignores the subject altogether or gives a misleading account of it. Broadly speaking it is dominated by two major strands of thought, one making human nature and the other culture the basis of political theory. Arguing rightly that political theory should be grounded in a theory of human beings, and wrongly equating the latter with a theory of human nature, the first group of writers, whom I shall call naturalists or monists, claimed to arrive at one true or rational way of understanding man and the world and leading the good life.[9] Some, such as the Greek and Christian philosophers, J. S. Mill and Hegel, took a substantive or 'thick' view of human nature, whereas Hobbes, Locke and Bentham opted for a largely formal or 'thin' view. Both alike, however, assumed that human nature was unchanging, unaffected in its essentials by culture and society, and capable of indicating what way of life was the best. Their thought therefore left little creative role for culture, seeing it as largely epiphenomenal, confined to the morally indifferent areas of customs and rituals, and making little difference to how moral and political life should be organized.

Culturalism or pluralism, which emerged as a reaction against naturalism and was shared in different degrees by some of the Sophists, Vico, Montesquieu, Herder, the German romantics and others, made the opposite move. It argued that human beings were culturally constituted, varied from culture to culture, and shared in common only the minimal species-derived properties from which nothing of moral and political significance could be deduced. Although culturalists were right to appreciate the importance of culture, they misunderstood its

nature. Since they took an organic view of it, they ignored its internal diversity and tensions and could not explain how it changed and why its members were able to take a critical view of it. They split up humankind into different cultural units, and could not give a coherent account of how human beings were able to communicate across, and even evaluate the customs and practices of other cultures. In their own different ways culturalists ended up naturalizing culture, seeing it as an unalterable and ahistorical fact of life which so determined its members as to turn them into a distinct species.

Neither naturalism nor culturalism gives a coherent account of human life and helps us theorise multicultural societies. One stresses the undeniable fact of shared humanity, but ignores the equally obvious fact that human nature is culturally mediated and reconstituted and cannot by itself provide a transcendental basis for a cross-culturally valid vision of the good life; the other makes the opposite mistake. Neither grasps the two in their relationship and appreciates that human beings are at once both natural and cultural, both like and unlike, and like in unlike ways. If we are to develop a coherent conception of human beings, we need to subject each to a rigorous critique and break through their frozen polarity.[10]

* * *

This book falls roughly into three parts, the historical, the theoretical and the practical. The first part is concerned to trace the origins and elucidate the internal varieties of naturalism and culturalism. Its purpose is twofold; to undertake the kind of critique referred to earlier and highlight the continuing presence of the two traditions in many of the assumptions informing contemporary discussions of multicultural societies.[11] The historical part is not purely historical but theoretically structured, and not incidental or external but integral to the theory outlined in the second part. If it was to be done satisfactorily, it would have to include many more philosophers and discuss them in greater detail. Since that would have taken up the space needed elsewhere, the present arrangement seemed the best compromise.

In the first chapter I outline and trace the development of the naturalist tradition and distinguish and discuss its three major forms. Since liberalism is rightly assumed to be the most hospitable of all political doctrines to cultural diversity, I discuss at some length its monist tendencies. Although monism has been challenged from almost its very

beginning by a variety of small traditions such as scepticism, relativism and moral pluralism, cultural pluralism did not really come into its own until the eighteenth century when historical, sociological and anthropological forms of thought placed cultural diversity at the centre of the philosophical agenda. Since Vico, Montesquieu and Herder show varying degrees of sympathy with it, I examine their ideas in the next chapter and tease out their insights and limitations. Realizing the limitations of monism and pluralism, many contemporary theorists of multicultural society, almost all liberal, have sought to rethink the place of culture in human life and given the debate a new orientation. Accordingly I critically examine the thought of Rawls, Raz and Kymlicka and conclude that, although it takes us in the right direction, it contains unresolved contradictions and is too committed to some form of liberal monism to provide a coherent response to cultural diversity.[12]

Having established the need for a theory of multicultural society, the second part of the book goes on to sketch the outlines of one. It critically examines the concept of human nature, shows that, though valuable, it is too thin to do the philosophical work expected of it, and outlines a culturally sensitive theory of human beings which includes human nature but also much else. In the remaining chapters in this part I discuss the nature, basis and structure of culture, how and within what limits it is possible to arrive at cross-cultural moral principles, how cultures can and should be judged, the basis and limits of respect for other cultures, and the reasons why cultural diversity should not be viewed as a brute fact to be reluctantly accepted and accommodated but as a positive value to be cherished and fostered. In the following chapters I concentrate on the specifically political questions raised by multicultural societies, and discuss how these societies can be held together, develop a common sense of belonging, and reconcile the demands of political unity and cultural diversity. I suggest that in order to do so we need to rethink the modern state and explore new kinds of political structures that might be better suited to contemporary multicultural societies.

The third part discusses the practical problems of multicultural societies, such as what differences to recognize, how to resolve disagreements inherent in the struggle for recognition, deal with practices that offend against some of the deeply held values of the majority community, and apply the principle of equality in a culturally sensitive manner. Since abstract theoretical discussions of these questions cannot capture their complexity I concentrate on concrete examples drawn

from different societies. With all the good will in the world, a multicultural society is bound from time to time to throw up issues that divide it deeply and appear irresoluble. The Rushdie affair was one such and I discuss it at some length in the penultimate chapter to show why it got out of control, what kind of debate it provoked, and what it tells us about the nature and limits of political discourse in a multicultural society. In the concluding chapter I tease out the insights and errors of multiculturalism and restate my view of it.

In order to avoid likely misunderstanding, four general points need to be made. The dogmatism and intolerance I criticize in some traditions of western thought are to be found in the rest of the world as well, sometimes in even more acute and dangerous forms. The fact that I concentrate on the West should not be taken to imply that they are unique to it, or that I share Nietzsche's and Heidegger's simplistic view that the drive for cultural domination is deeply rooted in its very structure of thought. I do not discuss non-western traditions of thought for reasons of space, my own limited knowledge of them, and to give the book a clear focus.

Second, there is a recurrent tendency in some circles to equate multiculuralism with minorities, especially nonwhites, and to see it as a revolt of the restless natives asserting their dubious cultural values and demanding special rights. In this discourse multiculturalism is racialized and becomes a site for thinly veiled racist sentiments. This is most unfortunate. As I argue, multiculuralism is not about minorities, for that implies that the majority culture is uncritically accepted and used to judge the claims and define the rights of minorities. 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.

Third, it might be asked if the theory I sketch in the book is liberal in character or of some other ideological persuasion. The question is misconceived and arises from a misunderstanding of the nature of multicultural society. By definition a multicultural society consists of several cultures or cultural communities with their own distinct systems of meaning and significance and views on man and the world. It cannot therefore be adequately theorised from within the conceptual framework of any particular political doctrine which, being embedded in, and structurally biased towards, a particular cultural perspective, cannot do justice to others. This is as true of liberalism as of any other political

doctrine. Liberalism is a substantive doctrine advocating a specific view of man, society and the world and embedded in and giving rise to a distinct way of life. As such it represents a particular cultural perspective and cannot provide a broad and impartial enough framework to conceptualise other cultures or their relations with it.[13]

It might be argued that since we live in a liberal society, we need to and may legitimately seek to develop a liberal theory of multicultural society. The argument excludes non-western societies, many of which are not liberal and some do not even aspire to be one, and we cannot exclude them from our theoretical inquiry. Even so far as western societies are concerned, they are multicultural and include cultures some of which are liberal and some others nonliberal or cut across and cannot be easily subsumed under either. Since the latter contest liberal principles, neither the society nor a theory of it can be constructed on these principles alone. To do so is both unjust, because it denies the legitimate claims of nonliberal cultures to participate in decisions relating to the political structure of the wider society, and risky because the resulting structure cannot count on their allegiance. Since liberalism is a powerful political and moral presence in western society, any theory of multicultural society must take full account of and critically engage with it, but it cannot remain confined to it.

This does not mean that we should not construct a liberal theory of multicultural society as Kymlicka and others have done, for it explores and deepens the theoretical resourses of liberalism and has a persuasive power over liberals, but rather that such a theory cannot provide an intellectually coherent and morally acceptable theoretical basis of multicultural society. We need to rise to a higher level of philosophical abstraction. And since we cannot transcend and locate ourselves in a realm beyond liberal and nonliberal cultures, such a basis is to be found in an institutionalised dialogue between them. Like Gadamer, Hebermas and other theorists of deliberative democracy, though along lines somewhat different to theirs, the theory I sketch is dialogically constituted. It stresses the centrality of a dialogue between cultures and the ethical norms, principles and institutional structures presupposed and generated by it.[14] Some of the principles and institutions the theory endorses are liberal, and hence it has a strong liberal orientation. However, since it also endorses others that are not strictly liberal and brings them into a creative interplay with liberal principles, it departs from liberalism in important respects.[15] It bypasses the debate between comprehensive and political liberalism, both of which take liberalism

as the only valid basis of society and disagree about its extent or area of application, and stresses instead a shared commitment to dialogue in both the political and nonpolitical areas of life as the unifying focus and principle of society. Political dialogue has a distinct structure and is not as inconclusive and open-ended as is sometimes suggested. Commitment to it implies a willingness both to accept certain norms, modes of deliberation, procedures, and so on and to live with and act on such consensus as the subject in question allows.

Finally, since the problems thrown up by multicultural societies exercise the minds of not only political theorists but also ordinary citizens and political activists and leaders, this book is addressed to both. If these societies are to run smoothly the latter have to be brought in as serious dialogical partners, both to help them see their day-to-day problems from a deeper theoretical perspective and to learn from their practical experiences and insights. The fact that I have myself been involved for years in the public life of two multicultural societies and have run two of their major institutions provided a further reason for this approach. From time to time, especially in the last part, I therefore step back and forth between various audiences, confront each with the other's concerns, and switch idioms and levels of discourse. This has its obvious dangers, and I hope that I have managed to avoid at least some of them.

1

Moral Monism

The obvious fact that different societies understand and organize human lives differently and entertain different even conflicting conceptions of the good life has been noted and commented upon in all civilizations. In western thought, reflections on the subject go back to the ancient Greeks and have given rise to several responses, of which moral monism is one of the oldest and the most influential. Moral monism refers to the view that only one way of life is fully human, true, or the best, and that all others are defective to the extent that they fall short of it.[1] Since every way of life necessarily embodies several values, moral monism either argues that one value is the highest and others merely a means to or conditions of it, or more plausibly and commonly that although all values are equally important or some more than others, there is only one best or truly rational way to combine them. For the monist evil, like error, can take many forms, but the good, like truth, is inherently singular or uniform in nature. Even as the same proposition cannot be true in one place and false in another, the same way of life cannot be good for one person or society and bad for another. Although the monist considers only one way of life to be truly human, he is not committed to the view that all human beings or societies ought to live by it. He might believe that since they are unequally endowed intellectually and morally, those unable to lead the truly human life should be left free to live such inferior ways of life as are best suited to them. What he cannot concede is that the good life can be lived in several more or less equally worthwhile ways.

Although the monist has the theoretical resources to establish a hierarchy among different ways of life, it is not necessary that he should do so. He might agree with the Stoics that ways of life that fall short of the

highest are so imperfect and unworthy that there is no point in taking them seriously and establishing a moral hierarchy among them. Or, like the early Christian theologians, he might argue that the good does not admit of degrees and that ways of life are either good or bad and cannot be hierarchically graded. Or he might argue with the Gnostics and the Neo-Platonists that such a hierarchy should be avoided in order to discourage people from aiming at the next best way of life rather than the best itself. Although the monist need not grade ways of life, he cannot ignore important differences between them.

In order to show that one way of life is the best, the monist needs to ground it in something that all human beings necessarily share and is transcultural in nature. If some did not share it, they would not be bound by his preferred way of life, and if they shared it coincidentally it would lack a rational basis. The obvious candidate is human nature. The monist could also appeal to the structure of the universe, God, and so on, but in order that these can be shown to be binding on all human beings, they need to be mediated by human nature. He might define human nature strongly or weakly, as something that determines or only disposes humans to act in a certain way. And he might either give it a substantive content or only highlight its distinctive and largely formal features. Whatever his approach, and each has its strengths and limitations, the monist relies on a conception of human nature to deduce or justify a particular way of life.

If his conception of human nature is to do the required philosophical work, the monist needs to assume the following. First, the uniformity of human nature; that is, all human beings, however much they are divided by time and space, share a common nature consisting of certain unique capacities, dispositions and desires. The monist does not deny that they differ in important respects or that no two human beings are ever exactly alike, but insists that differences define their particularity not their humanity and do not penetrate or shape their shared nature. In his view differences are not autonomous, and only represent so many different ways of expressing or combining the shared universal features. Some men pursue wealth, others women, fame or learning. Although the objects of their desires differ, the underlying desire is the same, be it that for pleasure, status, recognition or pride. Like human desires human capacities too, in his view, have basically the same nature, structure and mode of operation. Reason, the allegedly highest among these, is the same in all human beings and functions or ought to function in an identical manner.

Second, the monist assumes the moral and ontological primacy of similarities over differences. Since only what human beings share in common is supposed to constitute their humanity, the monist argues that their similarities are ontologically far more important than their differences. Differences vary from individual to individual, do not affect let alone form part of their humanity, and are ultimately inconsequential. All human beings are human in exactly the same way, not each in his or her own way. Third, the monist insists on the socially transcendental character of human nature. Human nature inheres in human beings as their natural endowment. Although it can be developed only in society, it is deemed to be unaffected by the latter. For the monist human beings are therefore basically the same in different times and places, and their cultures or ways of life make at best only a minor difference. Fourth, the monist assumes the total knowability of human nature. For some monists human nature is relatively simple and consists of readily specifiable capacities and desires; for others it is complex and elusive but capable of being discovered by means of sustained philosophical, theological or scientific investigation. Finally, the monist takes human nature as the basis of good life or, what comes to the same thing, asserts the unity of good and truth. For the monist the content of the good life is determined in the light of the central truths about human nature, not merely because 'ought' implies 'can' but because the good lacks an ontological basis and remains purely subjective unless it is grounded in human nature. Since human nature consists of several different capacities and desires, the question arises as to which of them is central to it and should form the basis of the good life. The usual monist tendency is to stress the *differentia specifica* of the human species, be it the theoretical intellect, love of God, or the capacity for self-determination and autonomy.

Monism can take several forms. I shall briefly examine three of the most influential, namely the rationalist monism of Greek philosophy, the theological monism of Christianity, and the regulative monism of classical liberalism, and show how each has difficulty accounting for and coming to terms with moral and cultural diversity. Of the three the first advocates a substantive and comprehensive way of life, the second a substantive body of doctrines and a way of life based on them, and the third a relatively thin vision of the good life to which all ways of life are expected to conform. All three appeal to human nature but define it differently. The first takes a thick and largely secular, the second a thick and theologically grounded, and the third a relatively thin and secular view of it.

Greek monism

The tendency to argue that only one way of life is the best and that all others can be judged and even graded in terms of it goes back to Plato. For him the natural world was diverse and not uniform because God or the *demiurgus* would otherwise remain purely ideal in nature and lack perfection (Lovejoy, 1961, pp. 48–52). Each species had a distinct nature or rather embodied a distinct 'idea', and its characteristic mode of perfection consisted in realizing the latter and thereby contributing to the perfection of the cosmos. Different species formed a hierarchy based on the degree to which they realized the totality of goodness or the Idea of the Good.

For Plato, human beings were no different. Their characteristic mode of perfection consisted in realizing the potentialities of their nature and living up to the idea of man. While social customs and practices varied, human nature did not. This raised the question as to who was to discover it and how, for the person doing so was himself shaped by the customs and beliefs of his society, and the human nature he aimed to discover was itself overlaid with customs and hence opaque. Plato gave little attention to the question. He took the rather simple-minded view that human nature consisted of those capacities that were unique to humans, and that their discovery and the determination of their status called for a capacity for rational abstraction and critical reflection which a philosopher acquired after arduous training.

For Plato, human nature was composed of three basic elements, namely reason, spirit and desire. Reason was both theoretical and practical in nature. The former, which human beings shared in common with God, was equipped to acquire true knowledge of the universe, and the latter, which was unique to them, related to human conduct. The spirit was the source of psychological energy and expressed itself in emotions such as anger, indignation, pride, honour and ambition. Desires largely related to the objects of bodily and other needs. For Plato, reason was the highest of the three faculties. Desires were inherently unruly and required its directive and regulative control, and the spirit too had an irrational dimension and needed to be guided by reason. Of the two forms of reason, theoretical reason was higher because it was the source of the knowledge of the Idea of the Good without which practical life lacked coherence and direction. It also dealt with eternal and unchanging objects, was free of the constraints of space and time, and hence divine in nature. Plato argued that although all human

beings shared a common nature and possessed all three faculties, they did so in different degrees and were unequally equipped to lead the highest form of life. Depending on which of the three elements was dominant in them, different human beings found their happiness in different forms of life. Although these forms of life were good *for* them and indeed the only forms of life possible for them, their *objective* moral worth could be rationally determined and hierarchically graded.

Plato graded all human activities and ways of life on the basis of the hierarchical theory of the human soul. The *bios theoretikos*, the way of life devoted to the contemplation and pursuit of theoretical knowledge, was the highest. The activities and ways of life in which the spirit was the dominant principle came second, and those devoted to the satisfaction of desires came last. Plato readily admitted that all ways of life involved all three faculties, for the philosopher practised moral virtues and had his share of desires, and the artisan thought about God and the meaning of life. His hierarchical distinction was based on which human faculty dominated and formed their organizing principle.

Plato's discussion of the ways of life was intended to be universally valid, applying not just to the Greeks but also to others. To be sure, he did not say much about the latter, but what he did say reflected his general view.[2] The Greeks were a superior people to the Egyptians and the Phoenicians for, unlike the latter who took an instrumental and practical view of knowledge, they desired and pursued it for its own sake and valued 'theory' or pure contemplation. Unlike many an Enlightenment writer nearly two millennia later, Plato freely acknowledged that the Greeks had learned and borrowed much from others, but insisted that they had invariably refined and improved upon it, and that their very willingness to learn from others and the desire to 'travel for the sake of theory' as Pythagoras had put it demonstrated their superiority (Halbfass, 1990, pp. 6f). The fact that the Greeks had established a regime of free enquiry conducive to intellectual and other pursuits whereas other societies only knew despotism and tyranny offered further evidence of Greek superiority. Such a distinction between the Greeks and non-Greeks implied that relations among the former were governed by different principles from those regulating their relations with non-Greeks. For Plato, all Greeks constituted a 'single people', were 'kindred', and 'by nature' friends. Regrettably they did fight among themselves, but this was a 'civil strife' not a war and subject to certain rules: they should not treat each other harshly or take fellow Greeks as slaves. By contrast non-Greeks were their 'natural enemies',

and their relations with them were exempt from these constraints. Although opposed to wars for national glory and territorial expansion, Plato, like Aristotle after him, approved of those intended to rule over 'inferior' subjects (Tuck, 1999, p. 53; Aristotle, *Politics*, p. 12).

Like Plato, Aristotle was struck by the diversity of the natural world and explained it in terms of the principle of divine plenitude. Each species had a distinct 'nature' – the term he preferred to Plato's 'idea' – and took it to mean a dynamic and self-moving essence. All members of a species shared a common nature or essence, and their well-being and characteristic mode of perfection, as well as their distinct contribution to the harmony of the cosmos, consisted in realizing their species-potentialities.

Aristotle's view of human nature was somewhat different from Plato's. He did not assign the spirit a distinct status, and thought desires to be less chaotic and unruly than Plato did. However, he too believed that reason was the highest human faculty, and was both theoretical and practical in nature. Theoretical reason was divine and immortal and, although it was an integral part of human nature, it entered it 'from outside'. It was higher than practical reason because it was self-sufficient, free from worldly constraints, and enabled human beings to participate in God-like existence (*Ethics*, 1955, Book X, ch. VIII). Unlike the life of practical reason, which involved the development and exercise of moral and political virtues such as justice and courage and required other human beings, the life devoted to theoretical contemplation was self-contained and free from the contingent responses of other men. It dealt with immortal and unchanging objects, was most honourable and worthy, and offered the highest and lasting happiness. As Aristotle put it, 'That which is proper to each thing is by nature best and most pleasant for each thing. None of the other animals is happy since they in no way share in contemplation'.

Theoretical life was devoted to the study of theology or first philosophy, mathematics and physics, and of these the first was the highest. And even here, 'since pleasure is found more in rest than in movement', contemplating truths already attained was more pleasurable than inquiring after them (*Ethics*, 1995, Book X, ch. VIII). For Aristotle the best way of life was devoted to 'the worship and contemplation of God' (Ross, 1956, p. 234). Sometimes he gestured in a slightly different direction, arguing that, since human beings lived in society, they should also cultivate appropriate virtues and combine the contemplative with moral and political life. It is not clear whether he thought such

a balanced life higher or lower than the purely contemplative (Ross, 1956, pp. 232–4; MacIntyre, 1985, pp. 137–53). In any case he was convinced that only the life in which contemplation played a dominant role was truly human and happy. Next in worth was the life devoted to moral and political virtues and practical wisdom, and included above all the life of the citizen. The life devoted to productive activities had the least worth. Since human beings were unequally endowed, Aristotle thought that only a small minority was capable of leading the highest life. Many more were capable of the next best life, most others fated to lead the third best, and some were only fit to be slaves. For Aristotle a properly constituted society should respect this hierarchy and create conditions in which each way of life received its due recognition and importance.

In spite of their important differences, both Plato and Aristotle were moral monists and shared all the five assumptions of moral monism stated earlier. They classified and graded different ways of individual and collective life in terms of which human faculties these exercised and cherished, and graded the ontological status and dignity of the latter in terms of their metaphysical view of man's place in the universe. For them, humans occupied an intermediate position between God and animals. Theoretical reason, which enabled them to participate in the divine, was the highest, and desire which drew them closer to the animals was the lowest.

The vision of the highest form of life advocated by Plato and Aristotle is underpinned by a number of beliefs concerning the nature of God, the inner human impulse or duty to become God-like, the constitution of human nature, the idea of the highest or purest pleasure, and so on. They do not offer convincing reasons for these beliefs and sometimes only reproduce the cultural biases of the Greek aristocracy. This is not to say that their views are indefensible, though some are, but rather that it is possible to take different and equally valid views on the nature of God and man, purity of pleasure, the nature of human happiness and so on, and arrive at very different ideas about the best way of life. For Plato and Aristotle the philosopher's way of life is higher than that of the artist, the poet, the priest and the citizen because theoretical reason is the highest faculty and its exercise the source of true and lasting happiness. On different assumptions to theirs, just as plausible as

their own if not more so, their whole way of thinking appears self-serving and even incoherent.

As we saw earlier, moral monism disjoins reason and morality from culture, and Plato's and Aristotle's thought is a good example of this. It takes no account of the fact that different societies understand and structure human nature differently, cultivate different capacities and virtues, and assign different meanings and worth to human activities and relationships. To be sure Plato acknowledged the role of the 'type of human character' dominant in a society, and thought that it determines what kind of constitution suits it best. However, the character involved only refers to which of the three human faculties is predominant and has no cultural significance. Aristotle stressed the importance of social classes and relativity of the criteria of justice, but this, again, amounted to no more than recognizing the importance of economic interests. The closest either of them came to appreciating the importance of culture is their acknowledgment of the role of customs, which are but a small part of it. And even then they treat these as largely irrational outgrowths, spontaneous like natural vegetation, mute, passive and devoid of moral meaning and significance. Since both philosophers ignored the role of culture in shaping human beings, they were unable either to appreciate that the good life can be defined and lived in several different ways, or to guard against the influence of their culture on their own thought.

Christian monism

Like Plato and Aristotle, Christian theologians combined their even greater delight in the infinite diversity of the natural world with a commitment to moral monism. God could have easily created a uniform universe. The fact that He did not shows how great a value He placed on diversity (Lovejoy, 1961, pp. 64f). Augustine asked why God did not make all things similar and replied, *non essent omnia, si essent aequalia* (if all things were similar, all things would not exist). Thanks to God's infinite and overflowing love of His creation, He conferred the gift of actuality on all possible grades of goodness. He created diversity not as a vehicle of His self-realization, for He was already self-sufficient, but out of His love of his creation and as part of His design to create a perfect world. Each species in it was endowed with a unique

nature, occupied a distinct place in the universe, and contributed to its perfection and harmony by attaining its own characteristic mode of perfection.

Aquinas developed this argument more fully. Existence was a form of goodness, and it was better to exist than to be merely possible. The divine will, which always chose the good, willed the existence of all possible grades of goodness. The perfection of the universe consisted in 'the orderly variety of things', each reflecting the likeness of God 'according to its measure'. In a profoundly significant remark he observed that the fact that an angel was better than a stone did not mean that two angels were better than one angel and a stone, for 'two natures are better than one'. A stone might benefit from being an angel but the universe did not, for although the universe with two angels contained a greater quantity of goodness than that with one angel and a stone, it was less 'excellent' (*ibid.*, pp. 75f). For Aquinas as for many other Christian theologians, diversity was an intrinsic good, an irreducible and autonomous value, and the perfection of the universe as of any social whole within it consisted not in the highest possible quantity of goodness in the abstract, but in the widest possible variety of the natures it contained. As we shall see later this idea was used by Vico, Herder and others to provide a theologically grounded theory of moral and cultural pluralism.

The celebration of diversity in Augustine, Aquinas and others was grounded in a particular view of the universe and suffered from its obvious limitations. The diversity they celebrated was that of types or species, each endowed with a distinct nature whose realization constituted its characteristic mode of perfection. All the members of a species therefore had an identical destiny, to realize the potentialities of their shared nature. Indeed, since each species contributed to the harmony and perfection of the universe only by remaining true to its unique nature, its members must conform to the uniform norms of their species-nature. So far as human beings were concerned, they were to aspire for the same kind of perfection. Since they were unequally endowed or differently circumstanced, they attained their characteristic mode of perfection in different degrees, but it was inconceivable that they could lead different and equally legitimate forms of good life.

Christian moral monism differed from the Greek in several important respects. It was theologically grounded, and went hand in hand with religious monism or the belief that Christianity alone represented the 'one and true' religion. While Plato and Aristotle claimed to demon-

strate on philosophical grounds that a particular way of life was the highest, Christianity made it a matter of faith. Some of its theologians did, of course, seek to demonstrate its truths on rational grounds, but most realized that this could not be done. Some even welcomed this limitation because it showed that one accepted Christianity not as a matter of rational necessity but as an uncoerced act of faith. Plato and Aristotle had no interest in how the rest of humankind lived and whether or not it knew of their doctrines; for Christianity humankind had a vital common interest in salvation, and those knowing the way to achieve it had a duty of love to 'spread the good news'. This missionary work was theoretically facilitated by the fact that, unlike Plato and Aristotle for whom most of humankind was inherently incapable of leading the highest way of life, the Christian way of life was within the moral reach of all. Although Christian theologians admitted that some kind of moral life could be lived on the basis of natural reason alone, they insisted that it was inherently precarious because of the fallibility of natural reason, shallow because it lacked energy and depth which could only come from the love of God, and incomplete because morality was only a step towards the otherworldly life which alone represented the final human destiny. A truly moral life therefore needed a religious basis, and its quality was higher the truer the underlying religion. While Christianity thus accommodated moral diversity, it graded it hierarchically and remained as committed to moral as to religious monism. Christian monism introduced the ideas of moral universalism, missionary work and religious intolerance that were absent in its Greek counterpart.

Christian monism faced two problems, internal and external. Since its central doctrines could be interpreted in several different ways, its spokesmen had to decide whether to establish a theological orthodoxy or tolerate and even cherish hermeneutic pluralism. Secondly, Christianity was confronted with other religions such as Judaism and Paganism and later Islam, 'Hinduism' and others and, again, it had to decide whether to dismiss them as false or embrace religious pluralism. Although hermeneutic and religious monism do not entail each other, there is a tendency for them to go together, partly because intolerance and exclusivity in one area tend to encourage them in the other, and partly because the 'only true' religion cannot risk diversity of interpretations lest it should unwittingly come under the influence of other religions and compromise its absolute truth. Not surprisingly Christianity built up a powerful tendency towards hermeneutic and religious

monism. No great religion, especially one as philosophically rich and universalist in its ambition as Christianity, can suppress all internal differences or dismiss other religions as false. Christian monism was therefore constantly shadowed by a pluralist impulse, and its history is marked by a tension between the two.

In the early years Christianity was widely seen by its followers as a strand of thought within Judaism. Some of them even thought that one could not become a Christian unless one was a Jew. After all Jesus himself was one, Judaism provided the context of everything he said and did as well as his sacrificial death, and he could not be accepted as a Messiah without also believing in the Mosaic covenant, the Davidian monarchy, and the divine inspiration of the Hebrew Scriptures. Other Christians took a looser view of the relation between the two, but even they thought that one could be both a Jew and a Christian. Not surprisingly early Christians observed many of the ritual precepts of the Law and frequented the Jerusalem Temple. The subsequent Christian decision to reject the practice of circumcision and some of the Jewish dietary taboos was largely designed to facilitate missionary work among non-Jews and not to signify a break with Judaism.

For reasons too complex to discuss here things began to change radically towards the end of the second century. Christianity made a clean break with Judaism, and a Christian who observed any of its ritual precepts was excommunicated. It was argued that Jesus had not only fulfilled Biblical Judaism but established a new religion, and that his followers were now God's chosen people. Christianity was the only true religion, it had supplanted and superseded Judaism, and a Jew who fully understood his faith had a duty to convert to it. Such a view was not easy to maintain, for several passages in the Book of *Leviticus* stated that the Law was a perpetual covenant, Jesus himself said that he had not come to abolish or even alter but fulfill the Law, and several passages in the Acts depicted the Apostles as attending Temple services, observing at least some Mosaic dietary regulations, and performing various other ritual acts after the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus. Not surprisingly, Patristic writers devoted enormous intellectual energy to explaining all this away and insisting on a total rupture with Judaism. St Augustine played a decisive role in the process. Drawing on the scattered elements of Patristic thought, he worked out a position that was later incorporated into the Latin theological tradition and became part of the standard Catholic view.

For Augustine the Mosaic Law and all of Jewish history were significant only as a prelude to Christianity. Moses and other Old Testament prophets knew that the Law was grossly inadequate, a mere shadow of the true reality that was to come in the shape of Jesus. Christians were therefore the only true heirs of Moses, and the Jews who failed to covert to Christianity were guilty of apostasy. For Augustine the Hebrew scriptures themselves indicated that the Mosaic Law would be abrogated with the arrival of the Messiah and that its validity was historically limited. The Jews who continued to observe its precepts were spiritually blind, willful, 'carnal' (sticking to the letter of the Law and missing its deeper spiritual meaning) and idolatrous. They had become so degenerate that they had not only denied themselves the salvation offered by Jesus, but done the work of Satan by rejecting and crucifying him.

While denouncing the Jews and their religion, Augustine had to explain their part in the divine design (Augustine, 1967, pp. 218f; Hood, 1995, pp. 10–14). He was convinced that their providential role was to assist the spread of Christianity. Their status as homeless exiles and the destruction of their Temple offered the conclusive proof that God had rejected them in favour of Christians, whose church alone was the *Verus Israel*. They also served the purpose of vouchsafing the veracity of the claims of Christianity. If they did not exist, pagans would accuse Christians of inventing the Old Testament prophecies that pointed to Jesus as Messiah. Christians therefore had a duty to tolerate and even protect Jews not because they had given them their Messiah, let alone because every religion deserved to be tolerated, but because their existence furthered the cause of Christianity (Hood, 1995, pp. 10–15 and 110; Deane, 1963, pp. 72, 206–20).

For Augustine, Christianity was the only true religion, the Catholic church was its only authorized spokesman, and there was no salvation outside the Church (Gilson, 1959, pp. 165–84). Christians alone led a truly good life, and that too only if their faith was free of theological errors. It is hardly surprising that Augustine spent much of his active life fighting what he took to be the four great heresies of his age, namely Manicheism, Donatism, Pelagianism and Arianism, and laying the theological foundations of what he took to be the true interpretation of Christianity.[3] Surrounded by so many heresies, he could not avoid appreciating that sincere Christians 'accommodated the sacred words' to their understanding and 'found therein true albeit different meanings'. However, he was uneasy with the consequences of such

hermeneutic pluralism and insisted that new meanings were to be accepted only 'if they … are true', that is, in conformity with the views of the Catholic Church.

Armed with a doctrine claiming to offer the only true interpretation of Christianity, Augustine attacked non-Christians and heretics. Although he thought that the prevailing Roman way of life was not based on such low vices as greed and brute conquest but on the 'love of honours, power and glory' and created a free republic devoted to the pursuit of the common good, he was in no doubt that this *libido ista domination* was 'smoke without weight', a source of deep moral corruption, and had predictably led to Rome's ruin. Devoid of a true religion Rome was not a 'true commonwealth', lacked 'true justice', and offered not a genuine but only an 'allowable peace'. Like the individual, a society was to be judged by the object of its love, and only the Christian society which was based on the highest and noblest object of love in the shape of God was truly human. Augustine's rejection of Rome was so fierce that at every turn he juxtaposed 'your Virgil' with 'our Scriptures' and exuded the spirit of what one of his perceptive commentators calls 'Christian nationalism' (Brown, 1967, pp. 306f and 231).

In his early writings Augustine had argued that the state should do no more than maintain earthly peace, leaving the salvation of the soul to the Church and tolerating non-Christian ways of life. In his later writings he took the opposite view that the Christian ruler had a duty to cultivate Christian virtues among his subjects and use his power 'for the greatest possible extension of his worship' (Deane, 1963, ch. VI). The 'righteous persecution' of heretics and backsliders, which was designed to safeguard their own 'spiritual health' and save them from 'eternal death', was an act of love, like that of a father chastizing his undisciplined son. The ruler therefore had a duty to punish heretics with death, to ensure that no Christian was left outside the church, and peacefully to convert Jews and other non-Christians. If the latter persisted in their errors, they were to be tolerated but not accorded the full membership of society.

Unlike Augustine, Aquinas was more hospitable to some of pre-Christian thought. To be sure Augustine, too, had drawn philosophical inspiration from Plato, but he did not think much of his or Aristotle's political and social thought or of the Greek and Roman ways of life. Aquinas was sympathetic to and drew heavily on them. Rejecting the fear of the Franciscans and secular priests, the so-called Augustinians,

that Aristotelian ideas would corrupt the Christian faith, he produced a brilliant and generous philosophical synthesis of Christian and pre-Christian ideas. However, thanks to his belief in the absolute truth of Christianity and his insistence on the need for its one true interpretation, he adopted a largely instrumental attitude to Aristotelian ideas, taking over only those that fitted into the Christian framework as propounded by the Catholic church. Even then his theology remained highly suspect in the eyes of the church for decades.

For Aquinas, as for Augustine, religion was the basis of the truly good life, Christianity was the only true religion, the Catholic Church was the only authorized custodian of it, and an unquestioning faith in it was the only way to salvation. Since true faith was the *sine qua non* of the good life, Aquinas insisted that all possible steps should be taken to safeguard its purity. It was 'a much graver offence to corrupt the faith than to forge money' and deserved harsher punishment. If heretics and blasphemers persisted in their errors, they could be put to death unless political expediency and the likely disorder dictated otherwise. The same treatment was to be meted out to apostates who 'could be constrained, even physically, to observe what once they accepted for ever'. As for unbelievers, they threatened the faith of 'simple people', for whom it was 'dangerous' to hear 'anything different from what they believe' and who should therefore be 'forbidden to communicate with unbelievers'. Since it was prudent to tolerate smaller evils in order to avoid greater ones, unbelievers should be isolated rather than persecuted; as Aquinas says quoting Augustine, 'if you do away with harlots, the world will be convulsed with lust'.

Aquinas's treatment of Jews was not very different from Augustine's (Aquinas, 1952, vol. 2, pp. 43f; Hood, 1995, pp. 76–105). He thought that although they rejected the Christian faith, they accepted its anticipation in the form of 'the figure of that faith in the Old Law'. This was both to their advantage and disadvantage, the former because they did receive some divine guidance, the latter because they chose to disregard it. Since Jews shared some of the Christian scriptures and corrupted the Christian faith by their 'false interpretation' of them, their unbelief was a 'more grievous sin than that of the heathens' who did not accept the Gospel. Thanks to their sin of deicide, Jews were 'destined to perpetual slavery', and sovereigns 'may treat their goods as their own property' provided, of course, that they did not deprive them of the basic necessities of life. Christians were not to socialize or discuss religion with them, and Jews were not to be allowed to exercise public or even

private authority over Christians. Jews of both sexes should 'on all occasions be distinguished from other people by some particular dress', so that Christians may not inadvertently mistake them for one of them. As against many of his intolerant predecessors and contemporaries, Aquinas argued that the Jewish religious rites should be tolerated because they foreshadow the truth of Christianity and reassure its adherents that even 'our enemies bear witness to our faith'. Like Augustine, he saw Judaism as nothing more than a part of Christian prehistory, and Jews as a people whose theological *raison d'être* was to serve the cause of Christianity (Aquinas, 1952, vol. 2, pp. 432–40).

Aquinas was one of the first to formulate a coherent and influential Christian response to Islam. His *Summa Contra Gentiles* was a theological manual intended to guide Christian missionaries in Spain in their disputes with non-Christians. Since it was designed to convert the latter and since the arguments derived from the Bible were of no help, Aquinas based the work on allegedly neutral philosophical premises. They were, of course, nothing like that and largely presupposed the truth of the Christian faith. Aquinas had little interest in understanding Islam let alone entering into a dialogue with it. His main concern was to show that it was a false and immoral religion.[4]

Since the central doctrines of Christianity were deemed to be open to only one true interpretation, those disagreeing with it had no choice but to leave the Catholic fold and set up an alternative church and theology of their own. Luther and Calvin did not challenge the traditional belief that Christian doctrines were amenable to only one true interpretation, and simply replaced the standard Catholic view with their own. As Protestantism in turn gave rise to different sects, each of them made the same monist claim. Although Christianity became internally diversified, the monist claim of each group and the consequent doctrinal hostility to the rest did not encourage hermeneutic pluralism. The doctrinally closed, exclusive and dogmatic groups had little interest in a mutual dialogue or even tolerance, except among the dissidents at the periphery.

As far as other religions were concerned, Christians faced a problem. On the one hand they were convinced that theirs was the only true religion and that others were either false or inferior. On the other hand, they could not demonstrate such a claim and had the additional difficulty of explaining why God should be partial to them and condemn the rest to eternal damnation. By and large they stuck to religious monism and explained away the difficulties involved in terms of God's

inscrutable will, circular philosophical arguments, and the symbolic significance of the greater worldly success of Christian societies. Some non-Christian religions were rejected as false, others presented as commendable anticipations of Christianity. In either case salvation of their adherents lay in converting to it.

Thanks to the Holocaust, the end of the European empires, the pluralist ethos of our times, and the self-assertion of non-Christian religions, some radical rethinking is taking place among Christian theologians and religious leaders, and there is a genuine desire to understand other religions better. Such movements had, of course, occurred in the past as well, but they were confined to a small minority of liberals and disapproved of by the religious establishment. When, for example, Chicago held the World Parliament of Religions in 1893 in order, among other things, to explore what the *Chicago Tribune* called the 'wells of truth outside', some religious leaders condemned it for 'coquetting' with 'false' religions, and the Archbishop of Canterbury refused to attend it on the ground that Christianity was 'the only true religion' and had nothing to gain from a dialogue with others (Eck, 1993).

This is no longer the case today. Some years ago the World Council of Churches set up a unit in charge of dialogue with other religions, and it has done valuable work. The Second Vatican Council set up a special secretariat in 1963 to deal with non-Catholics, and issued a sympathetic *Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions*. The Declaration generously urged reverence for what is 'true and holy' in other religions and belatedly rejected the pernicious belief that Jews were guilty of deicide. It called their persecution immoral and insisted that they should 'not be spoken of as rejected or accused' (Ariarajah, 1991, pp. 129–30). In many countries there are also several church-inspired interfaith networks which organize dialogues between Christianity and other religions and explore areas of common theological and moral concerns. Indeed, it would not be an exaggeration to say that the initiative for the dialogue is almost invariably taken by Christians.

Contemporary Christian attitudes to other religions vary greatly, ranging all the way from their dismissal to their acceptance as equally worthy religions. The most influential and widely shared view, however, is to see them as valuable but wholly insufficient for salvific