

The status of foundational cultures in political thought on diversity

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Abstract

A popular and recurrent irritation with multiculturalism is that it insufficiently respects the established institutions and national cultural inheritance. Recent scholarship on multiculturalism has tended to frame this concern as a clash between minority and majority cultural rights. This presentation will begin from the perspective that the cultural majority and its rights should not be conflated with the established or foundational culture of a society. Four broad positions will be delineated on the status of a foundational culture in contemporary political thought concerned with diversity, two of which pay it no heed and two which do. Among the former, one position is simply indifferent to cultural identity including a national cultural identity (*'no recognition'*). A second is equally responsive to the cultural identities of groups in society and accords no special status to the foundational national culture (*'equal recognition'*), treating it merely as an incidental backdrop. A third position accords a special status to the historical or foundational culture and offers remedial cultural rights or recognition for minorities (*'differentiated recognition'*). And a fourth position acknowledges a special status to the historical or foundational culture while seeking to refashion and broaden the national culture and identity (*'multiculturalised national recognition'*). The presentation examines these four positions and assesses their prospects for bequeathing multicultural societies that are at one with themselves.

Biography

Geoffrey Brahm Levey is Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of New South Wales, Sydney. He is the author of more than 150 publications in political and multicultural theory and Jewish studies. Among these are, as contributing editor, *Secularism Religion and Multicultural Citizenship* (with Tariq Modood, CUP, 2008), *Political Theory and Australian Multiculturalism* (Berghahn, 2008, 2012), and *Authenticity, Autonomy and Multiculturalism* (Routledge, 2015). He is presently editing the *Research Handbook on Multiculturalism* for Edward Elgar UK.