

# SUMMARY

## 1. Introduction

It is nothing more than a matter of fact that our social world is crowded by moral, political, ethnical, religious, sexual, and social diversities<sup>1</sup>. An intriguing problem arises when one discusses how political institutions and political theory try to accommodate and deal with these diversities that could threaten the traditional notions of civic unity, stability, freedom, equality, and individualism with which Western liberal democracy as well as liberal theory are commonly associated. These considerations are particularly urgent in the debates about the regulation of the internal life of traditional (either religious or secular) communities that reject any simple assimilation to the practices and the lifestyles of mainstream society.

In this paper I discuss and criticize some liberal answers to the fact of diversity. The paper offers both a critical presentation of the contemporary liberal debate and a defence of a *political* liberalism that, assuming toleration as its basic virtue, brings to completion the ‘political turn’ inaugurated by John Rawls.

In the next section I present two distinctions one can find in liberalism. Considering the way in which a theory is justified, I draw a distinction between *comprehensive* and *political* liberalisms. Then, looking at the value each theory assumes as fundamental, I distinguish between *pro-autonomy* and *pro-toleration* liberalisms. Combining these two distinctions, I obtain four kinds of liberal theories: comprehensive pro-autonomy, comprehensive pro-toleration, political pro-autonomy, and political pro-toleration. In the third section comprehensive liberalism is rejected both

---

<sup>1</sup> That is not a completely new condition for liberalism. In fact, as K. A. Appiah writes, “the matter of diversity, far from being marginal to the origin of modern political philosophy, was central to it” (*The Ethics of Identity*, Princeton University Press, 2005, p. xv). If liberalism’s origins are to be traced back to the search for a peaceful coexistence after the XVI and XVII Centuries’ Wars of Religion, one cannot deny that liberalism had to do with diversity of religious, moral, and cultural beliefs since its beginning. What is new is the increased consciousness of that diversity. The reason for this circumstance should be searched out in the globalization, in migration, and in the claims for inclusion advanced by excluded minorities. For some accounts of historical origins of liberalism according to which Wars of Religion are at the starting point of liberalism, see J. Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, Expanded Edition, Columbia University Press, 2005, and C. Larmore, *The Morals of Modernity*, Cambridge University Press, 1996.

in pro-autonomy and pro-toleration versions. In the fourth section political pro-autonomy liberalism is analyzed and objected on the basis of its only partial acceptance of the *politicization* of liberal theory. In the last section I give a sketch of what a pro-toleration political liberalism would look like.

## **2. Liberal distinctions: political and comprehensive, pro-autonomy and pro-toleration.**

In this section I will give an account of two distinctions one can draw in liberalism. The first concerns the way in which a theory is justified, whereas the other pertains to which principle each theory assumes as fundamental.

If one considers justification, one can have *political* or *comprehensive* liberalism. Liberalisms understood as comprehensive doctrines<sup>2</sup> are defended by John Locke, Immanuel Kant, and John Stuart Mill. In spite of the differences between their theories all share the following feature: “they relate liberal commitments in political philosophy to some vision or conception of what matters in life and of the human person and its place in the world”<sup>3</sup>. These liberalisms do not hide the fact that their liberal commitments are grounded in comprehensive accounts of human flourishing, or in worked out theories about moral value, metaphysics, and religion. Comprehensive liberals maintain that political theory cannot eschew references to substantive moral or metaphysical normative considerations, and that the defence of traditional liberal concerns such as the respect of individual rights, neutrality, and toleration is dependent on their comprehensive commitments. For instance, as Charles Larmore writes, “Kant and Mill sought to justify the principle of neutrality by appealing to the ideals of autonomy and individuality”<sup>4</sup>, and Will

---

<sup>2</sup> A comprehensive doctrine “includes what is of value in life and gives life its meaning. Metaphysical doctrines regarding the nature of reality, and epistemological doctrines regarding the possibility and conditions of human knowledge are also comprehensive doctrines, as are all religions”. See S. Freeman, *Rawls*, Routledge, 2007, p. 332.

<sup>3</sup> J. Waldron, *Liberalism, Political and Comprehensive*, in G. F. Gaus, and C. Kukathas, Eds., *Handbook of Political Theory*, Sage, 2004, p. 91.

<sup>4</sup> C. Larmore, *Political Liberalism*, in *Political Theory*, 1990, p. 342. Here *neutrality* should be understood as the rejection of paternalistic restrictions for enforcing a specific conception of the good.

Kymlicka, which is a contemporary comprehensive liberal, defends toleration resting on the value of individual autonomy<sup>5</sup>.

Political liberalism is a more recent presence in the liberal landscape. It is the view mainly elaborated by the late John Rawls in a series of articles published in the '80s and systematized in *Political Liberalism*<sup>6</sup>. In this book Rawls tries to work out a liberal theory understood as a *political* conception. It has three essential features: it only applies to the basic structure of society, it is independent of disputable comprehensive doctrines, and it is elaborated from ideas implicit in the culture of a liberal democratic society<sup>7</sup>. But, apart from the complex details of Rawlsian position, I will assume that “political liberalism is not merely the name of a book by John Rawls. It is a distinctive approach to the problem of political power”<sup>8</sup> whose core idea is that, given the persistence of disagreement about the way in which one should live, liberal order should not be founded on the validity of a specific comprehensive doctrine. It should be pointed out that the distinction between comprehensive and political liberalism is not a difference between a moral and a non-moral political theory. A normative theory needs some moral content, and political liberalism, being a normative theory, has its own moral content. What distinguishes it from comprehensive liberalism is that “it tries to establish liberalism as a minimal moral conception”<sup>9</sup>. In plural and diverse societies, traditional liberal ideas of autonomy and individuality are too controversial to work as the basis of a liberal democratic society. Think about traditional or religious communities who place a particular emphasis on the value of group membership. As Larmore maintains, autonomy and individuality “have themselves become simply another part of the problem”<sup>10</sup>. Thus political power should be exercised according to reasons that everyone can accept independently of the comprehensive doctrine she endorses in her life. Underlying political liberalism there is the

---

<sup>5</sup> W. Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship. A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights*, Oxford University Press, 1995, Ch. 8.

<sup>6</sup> J. Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, cit. Other political liberals include, among the others, C. Larmore, D. Moon, M. Nussbaum, S. Macedo, and J. Shklar.

<sup>7</sup> J. Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, cit., pp. 11-15.

<sup>8</sup> B. Ackerman, *Political Liberalisms*, in S. P. Young, Edited by, *Political Liberalism. Variations on a Theme*, State University of New York Press, 2004, p. 79.

<sup>9</sup> C. Kukathas, *The Liberal Archipelago. A Theory of Diversity and Freedom*, Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 17.

<sup>10</sup> C. Larmore, *Political Liberalism*, cit., p. 345.

confidence that a liberal society can be just and stable even if individuals do not share comprehensive commitment.

The second distinction we are dealing with concerns the core principles of liberal theory. Autonomy and toleration are the values a liberal theory can assume as fundamental. In his *Liberal Pluralism* William Galston talks about “two quite different variants of liberal thought based on two distinct principles”<sup>11</sup>. Thus *pro-autonomy* (or *Enlightenment*) and *pro-toleration* (or *pro-diversity*, or *Reformation*) are the liberalisms one obtains if one thinks about the main liberal value. In general, pro-autonomy liberals tend to value autonomy in the sense of “individual self-direction in at least one of the many senses explored by John Locke, Immanuel Kant, John Stuart Mill, and American writing in an Emersonian vein”<sup>12</sup>. They stress the importance of rational self-reflection, individual choice, and revisibility of conceptions of the good. Instead, pro-toleration liberals are more *diversity-friendly*, and in general praise diversity understood as “legitimate difference among individuals and groups over such matters as the nature of good life, source of moral authority, reason versus faith and the like”<sup>13</sup>. Pro-toleration liberalism’s advocates defend the view according to which liberalism is not a theory necessarily committed to the (although not coercive) promotion of autonomous life styles and that human life can flourish also in not autonomous ways. Further, pro-toleration liberals think that the main purpose of a liberal theory is the peaceful and just coexistence of different individual and collective lifestyles. From their standpoint, liberalism is a theory whose purpose is the settlement of disagreement and differences about how individuals and groups should live together.

Jacob T. Levy has persuasively argued and with plenty of historical examples that “the autonomy/toleration dispute is not a new one, but one as old as liberalism itself”<sup>14</sup>. The distinction is rephrased as one between *rationalist* and *pluralist* liberalism. Rationalist liberals (Kant, Mill,

---

<sup>11</sup> W. A. Galston, *Liberal Pluralism. The Implications of Value Pluralism for Political Theory and Practice*, Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 20.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 21.

<sup>13</sup> *Ivi*.

<sup>14</sup> J. T. Levy, *Liberalism’s Divide, After Socialism and Before*, in *Social Philosophy and Policy*, 2003, p. 281.

Voltaire) are committed to “intellectual progress, universalism, and equality before a unified law, opposed to arbitrary and irrational distinctions and inequalities, and determined to disrupt local tyrannies”. Pluralist liberals (Acton, Montesquieu, Tocqueville) are “hostile to the central state and friendly toward local, customary, voluntary, or intermediate bodies, communities, and associations”<sup>15</sup>. Both rationalists and pluralists share a common commitment to the recognition of the value of political freedoms, but they have different attitudes towards the relation between individuals and communities: rationalist liberals are generally more suspicious about the dangers represented by intra-group oppression. However, belonging to one of the two liberal traditions does not forbid to a certain extent sharing concern coming from the other tradition. For instance, a rationalist liberal will admit limits to the promotion of autonomy, whereas a pluralistic liberal will recognize that group authority comes to an end in case of gross violation of human rights.

Combining the two distinctions I have been discussing in this section, I obtain four kinds of liberal theories: comprehensive pro-autonomy (CA), comprehensive pro-toleration (CT), political pro-autonomy (PA), and political pro-toleration (PT). In this way, we reach a sufficiently complete overview of possible liberalism in general that is also helpful in understanding and accounting for the contemporary debate about liberalism and diversity. The framework offered in this paper offers a rather complete overview of the available theoretical options in the contemporary debate. In addition, it is sensibly more complex than the one assumed in much recent political philosophy. For example, discussing whether autonomy or toleration are the fundamental liberal principles, Kymlicka writes: “this contrast is described in different ways – e.g. a contrast between ‘comprehensive’ and ‘political’ liberalism, or between ‘Enlightenment’ or ‘Reformation’ liberalism”<sup>16</sup>. Kymlicka conflates a distinction about justificatory procedures (‘political’ or ‘comprehensive’) with one about liberalism’s fundamental value (‘autonomy’ or ‘toleration’). In his framework any comprehensive liberalism is *ipso facto* pro-autonomy, whereas any political liberalism is pro-diversity. The next sections will show that a comprehensive liberalism can assume

---

<sup>15</sup> Ivi, p. 279.

<sup>16</sup> W. Kymlicka, *Contemporary Political Philosophy. An Introduction*, Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 229.

as fundamental principle either autonomy or toleration. Similarly, a political liberalism can be either pro-autonomy or pro-toleration.

### **3. Rejecting comprehensive liberalisms.**

In this section I will discuss and criticize comprehensive liberalisms' attempt to accommodate diversity. Will Kymlicka's theory will be assumed as an instance of CA, whereas William Galston's will be examined as a CT liberalism.

Kymlicka works out a systematic liberal theory of multiculturalism. The liberalism he defends is overtly comprehensive and pro-autonomy and alleges to be adequate in addressing cultural diversity represented by national and ethnic minorities (or migrants). Kymlicka maintains that one needs an appeal to the "general value of individual autonomy"<sup>17</sup> for protecting and enforcing the whole range of liberal rights and freedoms as well as the rights liberalism is requested to grant to minorities. Kymlicka understands autonomy as rational revisibility of ends. In his argument choice has value in so far as it allows us to assert what has value. In this sense, Kymlicka's notion of choice and autonomy is less substantive than the Kantian (according to which choice is intrinsically valuable as it reflects human rational nature) and Millian (which appeals to the intrinsic value of individuality) views<sup>18</sup>.

According to Kymlicka, the recognition of rights for minority groups, far from being a departure from liberal tenets, descends from liberalism itself. Or better, from liberalism as he himself conceives of it. Kymlicka's liberal political morality foundation can be expressed in the following proposition: "our essential interest is in leading a good life"<sup>19</sup>. The fulfilment of a good life demands that "we lead our life from inside" and that we are "free to question those beliefs, to examine them in the light of whatever information and examples and arguments our culture can

---

<sup>17</sup> W. Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship*, cit., p. 163.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 212.

<sup>19</sup> W. Kymlicka, *Liberalism, Community, and Culture*, Clarendon Press, 1989, p. 10.

provide”<sup>20</sup>. These are the two preconditions for living a good life. Thus, individuals need both civil and personal liberties for living in accordance with what they deem valuable, and “the cultural conditions conducive to acquiring an awareness of different views about good life, and to acquiring an ability to intelligently examine and re-examine these views”<sup>21</sup>.

Cultural membership is particularly significant in Kymlicka’s theory. *Culture* is both the context in which individuals exercise their choices, and source of individual identity. Thus, state interest for the thriving of a culture is not misplaced as far as it addresses the conditions for individual flourishing. Rather, it could be demanded by those liberal egalitarian principles which are upheld by Kymlicka. According to Rawlsian liberal egalitarianism, a just distribution should not depend from “the arbitrariness of natural contingency and social fortune”<sup>22</sup>. Similarly, Ronald Dworkin has proposed an *ambition sensitive* and *endowment insensitive*<sup>23</sup> theory of distributive justice according to which individuals should not be subjected to misfortunes that are beyond their control. If all this holds, given that the disadvantage people suffer for the decay of their culture is beyond individual direct control, it is a problem liberalism should care about. Cultural disadvantage becomes particularly relevant when one considers minority groups’ condition: majority rules and shapes social space according to its values, ideals, and beliefs. Kymlicka claims that “it must be recognized that the members of minority cultures can face inequalities which are the product of their circumstances or endowment, not their choices and ambitions”<sup>24</sup>. Thus the recognition of some rights to them turns out to be fully consistent with liberal theory. Kymlicka explains that minority rights advocated by his theory are to be understood as ‘external protections’ rather than ‘internal restrictions’<sup>25</sup>, that is as policies aimed at limiting the impact of majority decisions on minorities rather than as restriction to individual conduct. So, in Kymlicka’s theory, minority rights cannot authorize the violation of basic civil and political liberties.

---

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 13.

<sup>21</sup> *Ivi*.

<sup>22</sup> J. Rawls, *A Theory of Justice (Revised Edition)*, Harvard University Press, 1999, p. 82.

<sup>23</sup> R.Dworkin, *What is Equality? Part 2: Equality of Resources*, in *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 1981, p. 311.

<sup>24</sup> W. Kymlicka, *Liberalism, Community, and Culture*, cit., p. 190.

<sup>25</sup> W. Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship*, cit., p. 36.

Some problems for Kymlicka's approach emerge if one considers that it aims to *liberalize*<sup>26</sup> minorities. Although Kymlicka, distinguishing between the identification of the most adequate liberal theory and the imposition of liberal principles to non-liberal minorities<sup>27</sup>, rules out that the process of liberalization goes through coercive measures, I argue that nonetheless his commitment to autonomy and related ideas creates serious tensions in accommodating diversity. Firstly, the idea of 'leading life from inside' is not universally accepted: it is "essentially Protestant, and played only a limited role in classical Athens and Rome, medieval Europe, Catholic Christianity and non-western civilizations"<sup>28</sup>. Moreover, the way in which Kymlicka envisages the relation between each individual and her culture is not beyond dispute. In fact, as Monique Deveaux has observed, "rather than citing 'meaningful individual choice' as the most important benefit of cultural membership, members of cultural minority groups might stress the ways in which membership provides a sense of place and belonging"<sup>29</sup>. In addition, if a culture "is valuable in so far as it contributes to the exercise of autonomy, rights to the protection of culture are justified only in the cases of those groups, or those cultures, that value autonomy"<sup>30</sup>: an autonomy based liberalism could discount the rights claims advanced by those groups who do not recognize autonomy's primacy but who could equally be in a situation of undeserved disadvantage. Thus if we ground minorities' accommodation in controversial values, we run the risk of marginalizing all those groups who do not confer any particular value to autonomous lifestyles and individualistic ways of flourishing.

The *liberalization* could actually transform minorities "into something they are not"<sup>31</sup>. There is no particular trouble about cultures' transformation: unless one conceives of cultures as isolated and unchangeable entities, one needs to recognize that historical circumstances and reciprocal relations continuously work in favour of cultures' evolution. The problem is that transformations

---

<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 94.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 164-165.

<sup>28</sup> B. Parekh, *Rethinking Multiculturalism. Cultural Diversity and Political Theory*, Palgrave, 2006<sup>2</sup>, p. 106.

<sup>29</sup> M. Deveaux, *Cultural Pluralism and the Dilemmas of Justice*, Cornell University Press, 2000, p. 132.

<sup>30</sup> M. Moore, *The Ethics of Nationalism*, Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 55.

<sup>31</sup> B. Parekh, *Rethinking Multiculturalism*, cit., p. 108.

mainly concern minority groups, and that this process is carried out according to values that they do not endorse.

In partial response to an objection like that, Kymlicka has argued that minorities' integration (especially for what concerns migrants) is a "two-way street"<sup>32</sup>, in the sense that it involves transformations both in majority and minority. More recently Kymlicka has written also that "the liberal view of multiculturalism is inevitably, intentionally, and unapologetically transformational of people's cultural traditions"<sup>33</sup>. Dominant and subordinate groups should interact on the basis of fair terms. The former are asked to "renounce fantasies of racial superiority, to relinquish claims to exclusive ownership of the state, and to abandon attempts to fashion public institutions solely in its national image"<sup>34</sup>, whereas minorities should abandon practices contrary to liberal democratic principles. The problem again is that the dominant group is requested transformations according to principles it endorses (but that it disrespects for various and contingent reasons), whereas the minority is asked to transform according to values it does not approve of.

William Galston's *diversity liberalism* promises to be more accommodating of diversity than Kymlicka's approach. Galston's objection to any version of autonomy liberalism on the basis of the idea that "autonomy is one possible mode of existence in liberal societies – one among others"<sup>35</sup> points toward an extended acceptance of diversity, at least in *practical* terms. Galston states that if public institutions assume autonomy's primacy, individuals and groups who deny that autonomy is always required for human thriving could experience liberal public space as an alien place. Thus, if liberalism privileges autonomy, the rather common idea according to which this theory could be no more than a sectarian doctrine notwithstanding its traditional aspirations to impartiality, neutrality, and universality, could dangerously be true. Galston maintains that "autonomy based-arguments are bound to marginalize those individuals and groups who cannot conscientiously embrace the

---

<sup>32</sup> W. Kymlicka, *The Politics in the Vernacular. Nationalism, Multiculturalism, Citizenship*, Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 171.

<sup>33</sup> W. Kymlicka, *Multicultural Odysseys. Navigating the New International Politics of Diversity*, Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 99.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 99-100.

<sup>35</sup> W. A. Galston, *Liberal Pluralism*, cit., p. 24.

Enlightenment impulse”<sup>36</sup>. For in our societies there are many individuals and groups whose ideal of human flourishing is in no way associated with autonomous choice, critical self-reflection, and all those attitudes generally related with a liberal-rationalistic idea of individual. Thus, according to Galston, “properly understood liberalism is about the protection of diversity, not the valorization of choice”<sup>37</sup>. Assuming the protection of diversity as the core value of a political theory allows Galston’s theory to pursue “a policy of *maximum feasible accommodation*”<sup>38</sup> whose constraints are the requisites of civic unity and individual security. Moreover, it enables political institutions to take diversity seriously without imposing liberal values in the internal life of those groups that live in contemporary liberal societies.

Galston’s *diversity liberalism* relies on three resources: expressive liberty, political pluralism, and value pluralism. Expressive liberty is “the normatively privileged and institutionally defended ability of *individuals* and *groups* to lead their lives as they see fit”<sup>39</sup>. In a liberal state individuals should live according to values and beliefs they endorse, even if that runs contrarily to the principles upheld by the majority. They can join even non-liberal associations provided that they enjoy “meaningful”<sup>40</sup> exit rights. Political pluralism is the view that refuses the idea of the state as plenipotentiary power toward the plurality of associations and groups one can find in liberal democratic societies: state is just one among many legitimate authorities, and it is not the one that should always prevail. Finally, value pluralism is “an account of the actual structure of the

---

<sup>36</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 25-26.

<sup>37</sup> W. A. Galston, *Liberal Purposes. Goods, Virtues, and Diversity in the Liberal State*, Cambridge University Press, 1991, p. 329.

<sup>38</sup> W. A. Galston, *Liberal Pluralism*, cit., p. 20.

<sup>39</sup> W. A. Galston, *The Practice of Liberal Pluralism*, Cambridge University Press, 2005, p. 45, my emphasis. Expressive liberty has limits. For example, it would object to human sacrifice for religious or conscientious reasons, but it would approve of some practices of conservative groups (for instance gender separation or male circumcision) that an *autonomy liberal* would condemn as unsuited to liberal societies.

<sup>40</sup> Exit rights are *meaningful* when individuals: are aware of other lifestyles, are able to assess the life in other communities, are free from psychological coercion, and have the capacity for living in a different group from the one they want to leave. See W. A. Galston, *Liberal Pluralism*, cit., p. 123. As one can see, the conditions required for meaningful exit rights are rather demanding. In some cases they could ask for a level of state intervention in tension with political pluralism’s idea of the functions of the state. See D. M. Weinstock, *Liberalism, Multiculturalism, and Internal Minorities*, in A. S. Laden, and D. Owen, Edited by, *Multiculturalism and Political Theory*, Cambridge University Press, 2007.

normative universe”<sup>41</sup> according to which there are many and heterogeneous goods irreducible to a single value. Value pluralism, although it rejects relativistic conclusions, rules out the possibility of fully rank-ordering the distinct and conflicting values that we encounter in our moral life. From the point of view of value pluralism there is also no value or good (no *summum bonum*) always having priority when there is a conflict with other values and goods. This form of moral realism<sup>42</sup> is fundamental in Galston’s theory. In fact, it is value pluralism, together with his persistent objection to the view that liberalism has to “decouple political theory from other domains of enquiry”<sup>43</sup>, that signals the *comprehensivity* of Galston’s liberalism. For value pluralism is a complex and controversial theory about the nature of moral values, and, as will be clearer in the next section, *political* liberalism does not need any commitment about such issues: what does matter from its standpoint is that there is a plurality of conceptions of the good (the so called ‘fact of pluralism’) and that people, even ‘reasonable’ people, tend to disagree about the best way of living<sup>44</sup>.

The political implications of value pluralism are not immediately clear. Among the theorists accepting value pluralism the compatibility between this account of moral world and liberalism is a matter of dispute. Theorists like I. Berlin, B. Williams, and G. Crowder, claim that pluralism is attuned with liberalism, whereas others like J. Gray believe that the acceptance of value pluralism and the consequent refusal of autonomy (and even negative liberty) as the trump value leads to conceiving of liberalism as a theory of only local authority<sup>45</sup>. Galston follows Berlin’s route in trying to elaborate a liberal theory that assumes value pluralism and negative liberty as fundamental ideas. For Galston and Berlin, negative liberty should be understood as “the capacity of individuals unimpeded by external coercion or constraints, to choose for themselves among competing

---

<sup>41</sup> W. A. Galston, *Liberal Pluralism*, cit., p. 30.

<sup>42</sup> For Galston value pluralism is a form of moral realism because it presupposes “the existence of moral realm that is in some sense ‘there’, apart from our emotional projections and cultural constructions”. See W. A. Galston, *The Practice of Liberal Pluralism*, cit., p. 12.

<sup>43</sup> W. A. Galston, *Liberal Pluralism*, cit., p. 8.

<sup>44</sup> The incompatibility between value pluralism and political liberalism has been forcefully argued by Charles Larmore in *The Morals of Modernity*, Cambridge University Press, 1996, Chapter 3.

<sup>45</sup> For a recent and well informed survey of the different positions see G. Crowder, *Value Pluralism and Liberalism. Berlin and Beyond*, in G. Crowder, and H. Hardy, Edited by, *The One and the Many. Reading Isaiah Berlin, Reading Isaiah Berlin*, Prometheus Books, 2007.

conceptions of good or valuable lives”<sup>46</sup>. A minimal conception of liberty<sup>47</sup> such as this can have a privileged status in value pluralism and can function as the starting point for the elaboration of a liberalism that, as I said, seems very sympathetic towards diversity. And yet, at a closer sight, it has its own difficulties.

Firstly, for what concerns diversity liberalism I argue that is not clear if it conceives of diversity as “its point of departure”<sup>48</sup> or as the value that should be protected or pursued through public policies. In this last case, one would have a position in conflict with the pluralist view according to which there is no ultimate value that public policy should always pursue. In addition, diversity, from a liberal perspective, is a fact of social life having as such no particular value. It is simply a sociological fact that our societies are diverse for what concerns morality, religion, and politics. Diversity as such is not a value and we can have circumstances in which homogeneity could be preferable to diversity. Think for instance about the degree of convergence required by the good functioning of some religious or political associations. As Chandran Kukathas has written, “diversity is not the value liberalism pursues but the source of the problem to which it offers a solution”<sup>49</sup>. Liberalism is required to give an answer to the problem of elaborating agreeable principles for making possible the peaceful coexistence in a society extensively pervaded by the conflict about how one should live. Posing from the starting point that diversity is the value that liberalism should protect could mean puzzling the priorities and the finalities of liberal inquiry.

Others problems of Galston’s approach concern the way in which value pluralism is employed. It is a philosophical view about plurality and incommensurability of conflicting goods, not cultures, so it should emphasize a state of affairs in which many values compete without always having a valid rule of priority. Galston himself recognize this feature of value pluralism when he

---

<sup>46</sup> W. A. Galston, *Liberal Pluralism*, cit., p. 48. See also, I. Berlin, *Four Essays on Liberty*, Oxford University Press, 1969, Chapter 3.

<sup>47</sup> According to Galston, assuming this idea of negative liberty does not commit to some controversial philosophical or psychological systems. What does matter is only the absence of coercion when one wants to leave a community that risks becoming a prison.

<sup>48</sup> W. A. Galston, *Liberal Pluralism*, cit., p. 26.

<sup>49</sup> C. Kukathas, *Liberal Archipelago*, cit., p. 29.

refers to it as a resource to ground a liberal theory. For he claims that “while liberal pluralists celebrate legitimate diversity among cultures, they suspect that diversity will exist within culture as well and that a culture’s smoothly homogeneous public face reflects the covert operation of power”<sup>50</sup>. This statement results in patent tension with Galston’s acceptance of the *Wisconsin v. Yoder*<sup>51</sup> decision, in which the parents of three Amish families claimed that an excess of their children’s exposure to diversity would have been obnoxious to the preservation of their lifestyle. They requested and obtained two years of exemption of their children from a Wisconsin law prescribing school attendance until the age of sixteen. The homogeneity and the social immobility of Amish society could be a signal of an unjustified and oppressing power exercised from the strongest against the weakest members of the group. At this point, I agree with George Crowder’s when he notices that “Galston does not go as far as Gray in identifying the incommensurability of values with the incommensurability of political regimes, but he tends similarly to equate diversity of goods with diversity of cultures”<sup>52</sup>. If the identification of the incommensurability of values with the incommensurability of political regimes easily translates into a relativistic view according to which there is no prospect for criticizing political institutions from outside, even the more moderate equation of diversity of goods with diversity of cultures is a dangerous move toward a relativistic position that is potentially illiberal and unavailable to Galston given his often stated idea that “pluralism is not the same as relativism”<sup>53</sup>. In fact, the emphasis on the diversity of cultures might hide the presence of oppression and coerced homogeneity within the groups themselves. In all likelihood there will be conflicts between diversity *among* cultures and *within* cultures, and Galston’s theory does not give us clear advises to deal with them.

#### **4. Political liberalism and diversity: *political* transformations.**

---

<sup>50</sup> W. A. Galston, *Liberal Pluralism*, cit., p. 64.

<sup>51</sup> *Wisconsin v. Yoder*, 406 US 205 (1972).

<sup>52</sup> G. Crowder, *Isaiah Berlin*, Princeton University Press, 1996, p. 163.

<sup>53</sup> W. A. Galston, *Liberal Pluralism*, cit., p. 30.

Stephen Macedo's work is a clear expression of political liberalism's principles. In a 1995 article he objected to comprehensive liberalism on the basis that their ideals are "deeply partisan and not easily defended", and that they "claim too much"<sup>54</sup>. Political authority should not be premised on the validity of divisive and controversial comprehensive doctrines such as the view that critical thinking is a necessary feature of a good life, or that religious truths are to be achieved in some specific ways. Closely following Rawls' approach in *Political Liberalism*, Macedo proposes "to put aside such matters such as religious truth and the ultimate ideals of human perfection" and stress "to justify at least the most basic matters of justice on ground widely acceptable to reasonable people – and not only to those who share our particular view of the whole truth"<sup>55</sup>: political liberalism asks to 'bracket' our deepest convictions and to focus upon what reasonable people can share.

The theory Macedo is advancing is not sceptical. It is not led by the idea that human reason is unfit to know moral, religious, or other metaphysical truths. Political liberalism "ask us not to renounce what we believe to be true, but to acknowledge the difficulty of publicly establishing any single account of truth for the whole of life"<sup>56</sup>. If common political institutions reflected a contestable account of moral, religious, or philosophical truth, one would have an evident form of disrespect for those who are committed to other comprehensive doctrines. In this sense, political liberalism's core motive is "the desire to respect reasonable people"<sup>57</sup>. Individuals express this respect when they discuss essential political subjects offering each other reasons they can share despite their deep differences, and exercise political power in accordance with principles on which individuals can converge from their different comprehensive doctrines. For disagreements about

---

<sup>54</sup> S. Macedo, *Liberal Civic Education and Religious Fundamentalism: The Case of God v. John Rawls*, in *Ethics*, Vol. 105, 1995, p. 473.

<sup>55</sup> *Ivi*. In the Rawlsian jargon, reasonable people are those who "are prepared to offer one another fair terms of social cooperation" and "agree to act on those terms, even at the cost of their own interests in particular situations, provided that others also accept those terms". See J. Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, cit., p. xlii.

<sup>56</sup> S. Macedo, *Diversity and Distrust. Civic Education in a Multicultural Democracy*, Harvard University Press, 2000, p. 170.

<sup>57</sup> *Ivi*.

conceptions of the good do not impede that people can agree on some public aims such as the value of equal freedoms, democratic institutions, and social security.

The *politicization* of liberalism can be understood as a tool for amending comprehensive liberalism's philosophical shortcomings in understanding and accommodating the problem of diversity. In fact, as Macedo maintains in a 1998 article, political liberalism is to be preferred to its opponent because the former, almost as a definitional matter, "accommodates a greater philosophical diversity at the foundational level than comprehensive versions of liberalism"<sup>58</sup>. If political liberalism does not rely on the validity of one among many conflicting conceptions of the good, it can more fairly accommodate and acknowledge the so called '*fact of reasonable pluralism*', that is the persistent disagreement among reasonable individuals about the ultimate matters of ethics, religion, and philosophy<sup>59</sup>. Whereas one could say that comprehensive liberalism "does not show very much respect for the choices citizens may make to live nonautonomously, as members of hierarchical societies or corporate bodies"<sup>60</sup>, political liberalism does not take a position about ultimate matters that are not directly relevant in the political domain. So it does not privilege those who are committed to an autonomy inspired conception of the good life, but at the same time it does not marginalize for instance those who conceive of their flourishing within conservative religious communities. And yet, political liberalism does not stand neither for an undifferentiated acceptance of diversity nor for an unconstrained neutrality among different conceptions of the good.

In fact, far from any attitude of celebration for plurality and difference as such, Macedo thinks that "diversity needs to be kept in its place: diversity is not always a value and it should not be accepted uncritically"<sup>61</sup>. Even for political liberalism there are 'healthy' and 'unhealthy' forms

---

<sup>58</sup> S. Macedo, *Transformative Constitutionalism and the Case of Religion. Defending the Moderate Hegemony of Liberalism*, in *Political Theory*, 1998, p. 79.

<sup>59</sup> As John Rawls argues, "political liberalism assumes that a plurality of reasonable yet incompatible comprehensive doctrines is the normal result of the exercise of human reason within the framework of the free institutions of a constitutional democratic regime". See J. Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, cit., p. xvi.

<sup>60</sup> M. Nussbaum, *A Plea for Difficulty*, in S. M. Okin, *Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?*, Princeton University Press, 1999, p. 110.

<sup>61</sup> S. Macedo, *Diversity and Distrust*, cit. p. 3.

of diversity, and the principles of a sound political theory are to distinguish among which should be accommodated and which should be rejected or constrained.

Macedo's liberalism is pretty demanding. According to him, liberal societies do not rest on diversity, but on "shared political commitments". Keeping alive a thriving liberal society requires "a shared public morality"<sup>62</sup> and specific citizens' virtues that do not naturally produce themselves, but call for public intervention, primarily through the public schools. Macedo's political liberalism is a kind of *civic* liberalism that goes beyond Rawlsian "concern with basic constitutional principles" and emphasizes "the importance of the wider civic life of liberal democracy in practice, as well as liberalism's educative ambitions"<sup>63</sup>. The civic society envisaged by *civic* liberalism is a shared moral space in which citizens respect one another as equal participants in the collective enterprise of self-government.

As I mentioned, Macedo's liberalism's notion of neutrality is very restricted. He argues that "political liberal principles are neutral only in being justified *independently* of religious and other comprehensive claims"<sup>64</sup>. Political justification does not rule out the possibility that people supporting different conceptions of the good will differently be affected by the liberal order. Promoting those virtues needed for the realization of a flourishing liberal society will be differently judged by progressive and conservative people. Political liberalism "will probably have the effect of encouraging critical thinking in general"<sup>65</sup> and will be more hospitable to the supporters of Kantian and Millian liberalisms than, for instance, to orthodox religious individuals<sup>66</sup>.

It would seem that political liberalism in general, and Macedo's in particular, is nothing more than a disguised comprehensive liberalism committed to the value of autonomy<sup>67</sup>. So, why do I consider his theory as a PA liberalism rather than an instance of CA liberalism? The main reason

---

<sup>62</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 146.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 169.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 169.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 179.

<sup>66</sup> See J. Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, cit., p. 200.

<sup>67</sup> This objection to Macedo has been moved by Christopher Wolfe in *Natural Law Liberalism*, Cambridge University Press, 2006, p. 116, and Troy Dostert in *Beyond Political Liberalism. Toward a Post-Secular Ethics of Public Life*, University of Notre Dame Press, 2006, p. 46.

resides in the justification Macedo offers for his theory: it is a *political* justification which, being independent of comprehensive claims and focusing on what people share beyond their ultimate disagreements, aims to be more *philosophically* receptive towards diversity. The notion of autonomy fostered by political liberalism is not a comprehensive one as far as it is not supposed to count in all the domains of life. Political liberalism entails that individuals are to be *politically* autonomous<sup>68</sup>, that is autonomous as free and equal citizens in a liberal democratic regime. The fact that political autonomy spills over in extra-political domains is a further matter that political liberalism should attend to<sup>69</sup> but that does not remove the justificatory difference between political and comprehensive liberalism.

This difference is manifest also in the way in which Macedo's political liberalism deals with diversity. As I said, his theory is very demanding and distinguishes between healthy and unhealthy forms of diversity. Macedo rejects 'negative liberal legalism', the view according to which the law is "a framework of impartial [and purposeless] rules within which individuals and groups may pursue their own divergent ends"<sup>70</sup>. This outlook grasps liberal attempts to limit state power but does not allow seeing liberal constitutionalism's more positive ambitions. Liberal societies' flourishing is not a natural fact but depends on certain citizens' attitudes that are not spontaneous insofar as they need a significant state intervention through the public education and other less direct means. Liberal state needs to *transform* individuals' and groups' commitments so that they can actively support liberal order<sup>71</sup>. In this sense, healthy forms of diversity are those "supportive of basic principles of justice"<sup>72</sup>. Thus, for Macedo, liberal state has to constitute normative diversity for its own ends. Collective and individual identities need to be transformed in ways that render

---

<sup>68</sup> For the notion of political autonomy in Rawls, see S. Freeman, *Rawls*, cit., pp. 361-363.

<sup>69</sup> Political liberalism's *spill over effects* are addressed in John Tomasi's *Liberalism Beyond Justice. Citizens, Society, and the Boundaries of Political Theory*, Princeton University Press, 2001.

<sup>70</sup> S. Macedo, *Diversity and Distrust*, cit., p. 14.

<sup>71</sup> Macedo points out that the interest for individuals' and communities' support for political order is not alien to liberalism. It is a rather old liberal concern. For instance, a classical liberal such as Adam Smith was aware that "local communities and other intermediate associations are important indirect instruments of civic education which may, nevertheless, need to be shaped and managed to some degree by public policies designed to encourage them to take forms that are supportive of liberal democracy". See S. Macedo, *Community, Diversity, and Civic Education. Toward a Liberal Science of Group Life*, in *Social Philosophy and Policy*, 1996, p. 252.

<sup>72</sup> S. Macedo, *Diversity and Distrust*, cit., p. 134.

them able to support a liberal democratic society. Once they have been transformed in this direction, they can organize and develop according to their comprehensive principles and beliefs. The process through which in the 1960's American Catholic Church was liberalized and, after a long period of distrust and suspicion, became an active supporter of democracy around the world is assumed as an illustration of the "transformative potential of civic liberalism". Macedo remarks that this transformation "did not occur accidentally"<sup>73</sup>, but was the deliberate outcome of, among other political acts, the principle of separation between political and religious power.

Macedo's liberalism is unapologetically transformative up to the point that it does not even despise assimilation, provided that it operated in nonoppressive ways, and is directed toward justifiable values, that is values that can be defended without an appeal to comprehensive doctrines. In fact, as Macedo argues, "the point of the transformative mechanisms is political. They are deployed in liberal politics, and their effects are welcomed insofar as they secure a system of political liberty and other basic political goods"<sup>74</sup>. Liberal transformations stress the need to enhance our civil interests, the common interests of citizens who decide to peacefully live together in a free and diverse society, not to advance a religion over another religion or atheism over religious faith in general. In this sense, Macedo's view is less demanding and more open to diversity than, for instance, John Dewey's *civic totalism* with his idea that democratic public morality should be concerned with what is ultimately true. Political liberalism neither has a negative attitude towards religion and other particular loyalties nor does want, in a Deweyan spirit, "to dissolve traditional religions in order to transfer religious energies to the common political project of progressive reform and the advancement of science and culture"<sup>75</sup>. It only asks that religious and other groups transform in a civic direction to support liberal order.

Up to now, the reconstruction of Macedo's thought has been eloquent in showing that the *politicization* of liberalism represents an interesting theoretical move for accommodating diversity.

---

<sup>73</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 134-135.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 137.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 139-140.

Political liberalism scores high for what concerns the accommodation of “philosophical diversity at the foundational level”. Eschewing any appeal to ultimate truths and focusing on the political domain (although it is not seen as isolated from other extra-political concerns), political liberalism can claim the allegiance of many who do not feel comfortable in a society ruled by a comprehensive liberalism. For example, if we think about religion, political liberalism, with its focus on the need to avoid questions connected with the ultimate truth of a set of religious beliefs, tends to be less sectarian than “deeply secular” and “truth seeking” comprehensive liberalism even for scholars concerned with the compatibility of Islam with liberal democratic values<sup>76</sup>. In addition, Macedo’s approach, with its emphasis on the civic dimension of political liberalism, enables us to grasp the fundamental dimension of individual and collective identities’ transformations involved in the accommodation process. Nonetheless, in the remaining part of the present section, I contend that Macedo’s understanding of the transformative dimension of liberalism is incomplete.

In a passage addressing the problem of which groups are worthy of being accommodated, Macedo writes that “the important point is that *we* must decide which communities are to be accommodated, and that there is nothing wrong with deciding on the basis of the best reasons that are available, and with due confidence in the worth of preserving liberal institutions”<sup>77</sup>. Remarking that *we* have the duty to decide whom and according to which principles is to be included in *our* liberal society does not allow to see some relevant issues involved in a fair integration of individuals and groups understood as free and equal participants in a liberal framework.

Firstly, given the complexity and the diversification of every liberal society it is difficult to identify the *we* in which the ultimate authority resides. Unless one assumes a monolithic image of liberal society, there will be more than one *we* competing for having the last word.

Secondly, it is difficult to imagine an accommodation that does not involve changes in the majority that receives new, and presumably different, groups such as migrants. Macedo’s approach

---

<sup>76</sup> H. H. Haidar, *Liberalism and Islam. Practical Reconciliation between the Liberal State and Shiite Muslims*, Palgrave, 2008, p. 104. Haidar considers Rawls and J. S. Mill as examples of (respectively) political and comprehensive liberalism. In this case, the reflections on Rawls hold for Macedo too, given his explicit reliance on Rawlsian ideas.

<sup>77</sup> S. Macedo, *Transformative Constitutionalism and the Case of Religion*, cit., p. 73 (emphasis in the text).

is well equipped to see only one side of the coin, that is the transformations demanded to minorities, whereas it is easily predictable that, at least descriptively, the inclusion of new minorities in a liberal state will alter its character. For instance, David Miller has argued that migrants' contribution to the reshaping of the culture of the nation to which they move is "a process that happens in any case"<sup>78</sup>. The relevant normative considerations arise when one considers which the more adequate way of accounting for this process is. Such an account has to recognize the value of migrants' contribution in a non-residual way: once they have lawfully been admitted, their status as less than equal citizen is unjustifiable in a liberal perspective. Imagine that a liberal society in which Catholicism is the most common religion receives a significant number of Muslim migrants<sup>79</sup>. Even though the society temporarily rejects full political integration for newcomers, it will be affected by many changes. Let us assume that Muslim children go to public schools with Catholic children. It is easy to foresee that, even without multicultural provisions aimed at accommodating newcomers, classrooms will become at least *de facto* multicultural. Later, if the Muslim presence is recognized and accommodated, the changes will be more extended: there will be new study programs, particular provisions for holidays, etc. In a subsequent stage, if migrants are fully included in the democratic process and obtain citizenship, one can imagine that "the acceptance of difference in the public sphere easily leads to a number of changes [...] so as to accommodate the newly included groups"<sup>80</sup>. The public space of the receiving society will lodge new individuals with their previously excluded different religions, beliefs, moralities, histories. The earlier Catholic and homogeneous society is going to not exist anymore. It will have been replaced by a new society in which both old residents and newcomers went through a process of reciprocal transformations. Once a liberal society decides, for loyalty to its own principles of freedom and equality, to accommodate new groups, even the *we* that in Macedo's model must rule on matters of inclusion becomes subject

---

<sup>78</sup> D. Miller, *Immigrants, Nations, and Citizenship*, in *The Journal of Political Philosophy*, forthcoming, p. 17.

<sup>79</sup> In this paper I do not take a stand on the debate between those who argue in favour of open borders and those who support restrictions to migration. For the sake of the example, suppose that the migrants have been admitted in the new country without serious dangers for its economics, stability, and social peace.

<sup>80</sup> A. E. Galeotti, *Tolerance as Recognition*, Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 200.

to changes. In other words, “*We cannot integrate them so long as we remain we*”<sup>81</sup>. Thus, a theory such as Macedo’s, undervaluing majority’s transformations, does not grasp a fundamental dimension involved in the accommodation of diversity.

To conclude, in this same section I observed that for Macedo “the point of the transformative mechanisms is political”<sup>82</sup>. Communities are accepted in the liberal state provided that they *politically* transform. Differently stated, individual should become autonomous and, although the notion of autonomy involved is a *political* one, it could be troubling if one considers that an exclusive focus on autonomy-enhancing transformations involves an undervaluation of the status of the minorities and a misconception of their role when they are fully admitted in a liberal public sphere.

## **5. Toward a *political* theory of toleration.**

In the previous sections I have been discussing three liberal approaches to the problem of diversity. Comprehensive liberalism was rejected both in Kymlicka’s pro-autonomy and Galston’s pro-toleration version. Kymlicka’s liberal multiculturalism appears to be unable to accommodate diversity. The emphasis on the value of autonomy excessively constraints the accommodation of diversity: the *liberalization* of minorities, considering that they could reject the primacy of autonomy without being dangerous for the maintenance of a liberal order, does not take seriously their difference. Galston’s theory, discarding the view that autonomy is the liberal *somnum bonum*, appears to go one step further. The recognition that in a liberal society there are many legitimate authorities and that liberalism demands respect for “expressive liberty” would seem adequate tools for dealing with diversity, at least in *practical* terms. And yet, value pluralism is not a safe ground: it is a view according to which there are many goods, but Galston seems to translate it in the view that there are many cultures. A similar shift could, contrarily to Galston’s premises, condone illiberal outcomes.

---

<sup>81</sup> B. Parekh, *Rethinking Multiculturalism*, cit., p. 204.

<sup>82</sup> S. Macedo, *Diversity and Distrust*, cit., p. 137.

The *political turn* represents a remarkable theoretical opening to the problem of diversity. Liberalism becomes independent of comprehensive accounts of good, truth, religion. Political liberalism, relying on what individuals can share despite their comprehensive loyalties, is more *philosophically* generous than comprehensive liberalism insofar as he accepts more diversity at foundational level. In the fourth section I discussed Macedo's theory as an example of what I labelled 'political pro-autonomy liberalism'. Macedo's view is rather demanding. He subordinates the acceptance of diversity to the *political* transformation of the minorities looking for accommodation. The notion of *political* transformation has been found highly problematic: it prevents us from seeing that the integration of minorities involves reciprocal transformations both in majority and in minorities.

I argue that the most adequate liberal theory for dealing with diversity has to be *political* and *pro-toleration*. The political turn must be brought to completion: political liberalism has to leave behind its commitment to autonomy, even to a political notion of autonomy. Demanding that individuals become politically autonomous could be too demanding and, as I observed examining Macedo's theory, could hide important dimensions one has to consider about the integration of the minorities. Political liberalism is accomplished and does not betray its philosophical premises when it is coupled with a commitment to toleration. Only in this way one can have a theory that combines political liberalism's *philosophical* openness towards diversity with the *practical* receptivity of pro-toleration views.

The liberal outlook one obtains does not "describes a set of standards and principles by which a community or society should live". A society will not be considered liberal inasmuch as it respects "the values which make it liberal"<sup>83</sup>, because these same values are matter of disagreement, but when the conditions for a peaceful coexistence of different individuals and groups have been realized.

---

<sup>83</sup> C. Kukathas, *Two Concepts of Liberalism*, in J. C. Espada, M. F. Plattner, A. Wolfson, Eds., *The Liberal Tradition in Focus*, Lexington Books, 2000, p. 98.

The liberal theory I am sketching is suspicious of those approaches based on recognition or dialogue as the best tools for addressing diversity. The empirical starting point is the realization that “minorities disagree with one another and, in some cases are riven by internal conflicts which reveal an absence of agreement even within some of the smallest communities”<sup>84</sup>. Presuming that the accommodation of diversity is always connected to political recognition of minorities’ difference could involve a misrepresentation of minorities. Apart from numerically isolated religious groups like the Amish, minorities are not natural, homogeneous, and unchangeable structures. They are subject to continual reshaping and internal dissent. Political recognition is not the right answers insofar as it could be associated with the idea that minorities are always civic spirited and express themselves through rights claims. Dialogical approaches are as well objectionable because they are extremely demanding for those groups and individuals whose rationality does not dialogically articulate. The argumentative resolution of conflicts could consolidate the dominion of those group who are more dialogically oriented, that is the majority.

Liberalism has to be ready to recognize that individuals can live successful lives even in non-liberal groups. Central power should not rule the internal life of private associations and communities, provided that they do not violate human rights and leave individuals free to flourish according to their own conceptions of the good. Anyway, state intervention has to be minimally invasive and not led by controversial ideas about the fulfilment of a good life.

From this brief account one can infer that in a pro-toleration political liberalism the role of the state is sensibly constrained. Does the significant reduction of state intervention inevitably commit to the anarchical view that the state is “the most powerful instrument of oppression and domination we have know”<sup>85</sup> and to Kukathas’ understanding of liberal society as an “archipelago”<sup>86</sup>, with the related undervaluation of the value of state unity?

---

<sup>84</sup> C. Kukathas, *The Liberal Archipelago*, cit., p. 33.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 159. In a passage of the same book, Kukathas admits that his “sympathies with (some form of) anarchism are quite evident” (p. 8).

<sup>86</sup> In *The Liberal Archipelago* (cit.), Kukathas argues that “the good society is best understood as an archipelago of societies; and because the principles which best describe such a form of human community are the principles of

For reasons of brevity, I cannot extensively engage with Kukathas' extremely challenging views, but I think that he overstates the weight of historical recordings in normative theory: from the fact that the state has (supposedly) been an extraordinary oppressive force does not immediately descend that it cannot be reformed. It could be possible and desirable that, if the state is led by the right liberal principles, its oppressiveness disappears as much as possible.

The "archipelago view of society"<sup>87</sup> has been criticized in a recent article by Daniel Weinstock. He argues that this view of society (defended among the others by Kukathas, Raz, Gray, and Spinner-Halev<sup>88</sup>) relies on two objectionable premises: the 'independence assumption' and the 'completeness assumption'. The first claims that "people's cultural identities are formed independently of the broader social and political structures of which they are a part", whereas the second asserts that "membership in a group account completely for members identity"<sup>89</sup>. The 'independence assumption' mistakenly assumes that groups are generally insular and isolated, whereas it is a matter of fact that groups and their cultures (with the exception of few conservative religious groups) interact and dialectically evolve. The 'completeness assumption' is equally flawed: it does not recognize that "typically, individuals belong to a plurality of groups"<sup>90</sup> (such as churches, political parties, professional or recreational associations) none of which can completely account for the character of a person.

To say the truth, Kukathas does maintain none of these arguments. In fact, he argues that "groups are themselves not in any way natural or fixed entities but mutable social formations which change shape, size, and character as society and circumstances vary"<sup>91</sup>. But, while Kukathas uses the mutability and the interactions of groups as an argument against their political recognition and

---

liberalism, the good society is properly described as a *liberal* archipelago. The liberal archipelago is a society of societies which is neither the creation nor the object of control of any single authority. It is a society in which authorities function under laws which are themselves beyond the reach of any singular power", (p. 22).

<sup>87</sup> D. M. Weinstock, *Liberalism, Multiculturalism, and the Problem of Internal Minorities*, cit., p. 257.

<sup>88</sup> See J. Raz, *Multiculturalism*, in Idem, *Ethics in the Public Domain*, Oxford University Press, 1994; J. Gray, *Two Faces of Liberalism*, New Press, 2000, J. Spinner-Halev, *Feminism, Multiculturalism, Oppression and the State*, in *Ethics*, Vol. 112, 2001.

<sup>89</sup> D. M. Weinstock, *Liberalism, Multiculturalism, and the Problem of Internal Minorities*, cit., p. 258.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>91</sup> C. Kukathas, *The Liberal Archipelago*, cit., p. 251.

in favour of the establishment of liberalism as the ‘politics of indifference’<sup>92</sup> towards personal attachments, Weinstock draws from the same premises the conclusion that “they must also be thought of as having obligations towards the state and the broader society”<sup>93</sup>. The idea is that people live in common spaces in which they have relations with people from other groups, and that these relations create obligations towards other citizens and the state. As Weinstock argues, “to revert to the archipelago image, since citizens of modern societies actually spend quite a bit of time in the waters separating groups from one another, they all have a responsibility to make sure that they are suitable to the needs of all”<sup>94</sup>. Thus, it is difficult, even for the individuals who live in relatively autonomous groups, to be completely free from reciprocal obligations.

To conclude, I think that the existence of these obligations could be consistent with the liberalism I am trying to defend. After all, Kukathas himself admits the existence of a state whose “role is to serve as an umpire”<sup>95</sup> who has to settle disagreement among groups or individual for the sake of a peaceful common coexistence. Thus, the crucial issue is not the existence or the disappearing of the state (at the end of the day it exists) but the reasons that regulate its conduct.

---

<sup>92</sup> See also C. Kukathas, *Liberalism and Multiculturalism. The Politics of Indifference*, in *Political Theory*, 1998, p. 691.

<sup>93</sup> D. M. Weinstock, *Liberalism, Multiculturalism, and the Problem of Internal Minorities*, cit., p. 261.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>95</sup> C. Kukathas, *The Liberal Archipelago*, cit., p. 212.