

For *Lori Jo Willett*  
and *Leslie Anita Chiang*

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**Theorizing Multiculturalism**  
*A Guide to the Current Debate*

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possible strategies from which we must reflectively choose. Some kinds of recognition claims, especially the “deconstructive” kind, are better suited than others to synergizing with claims for socioeconomic equality.

Young rejects this last conclusion, of course, having written what is in essence a brief for the politics of affirmative recognition. In the end, however, she offers no good reasons for thinking that such a politics can promote transformative redistribution. I continue to believe it cannot.

#### Notes

- 1 For a further elaboration of this approach, see my “Social Justice in the Age of Identity Politics,” in *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values*, vol. 18 (University of Utah Press, 1997).
- 2 For further elaboration, see “Social Justice in the Age of Identity Politics.”
- 3 Here Young’s own approach is deficient. The five-fold “plural” schema she proposes to characterize “group oppressions” is ad hoc and undertheorized. Indiscriminately mixing items from different regions of conceptual space, it contains nothing that cannot be analyzed from the standpoints of redistribution, recognition, or both. See my “Culture, Political Economy, and Difference: On Iris Young’s *Justice and the Politics of Difference*,” in Nancy Fraser, *Justice Interruptus: Critical Reflections on the “Postsocialist” Condition* (Routledge, 1997).

## 4

# Recognition, Value, and Equality: A Critique of Charles Taylor’s and Nancy Fraser’s Accounts of Multiculturalism

Lawrence Blum

Charles Taylor’s influential essay, “The Politics of Recognition,” has helped to solidify the view that *recognition* is central to multiculturalism. Taylor’s lasting contribution is to provide a plausible philosophical underpinning for a human need to be recognized in one’s *distinctness*, especially (as he focuses in his essay) on *cultural distinctness*. Taylor sometimes connects recognition to two other ideas – *value* and *equality*. I will argue that Taylor’s account of these connections is confused, and especially that the concept of “equality” is misplaced in the realm of culture. It is appropriate, however, as a form of recognition directed toward human beings not in their distinctness but in their shared humanity and equal citizenship. While Taylor initially credits this form of recognition, by the end of the essay, recognition has lost its link to the equality of common humanity and has been confined to the domain of distinctiveness.

In her essay “From Redistribution to Recognition?,” in this volume, Nancy Fraser never loses sight of equality as a primary goal of recognition as it is discussed within multiculturalist discourse; in this way she provides a vital antidote to Taylor’s view. At the same time, Fraser, I will argue, loses sight of precisely what gives Taylor’s essay its canonical place in the literature – the human need for a recognition of distinctness, *apart from* its connection to social and political equality.

“Multiculturalism” is a contested term. I will include within its reach opposition to racism, or an ideal of racial justice, though some discussions distinguish the latter from the former. The character of the groups we think of as “cultures” in the context of multiculturalism, especially within

the United States – African Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans, and Native Americans – are intimately bound up with the *racial* history of the US and the racist treatment of these groups. In fact, these groups are often thought of as “racial” groups. (David Hollinger’s felicitous term “ethno-racial groups” preserves this duality.)<sup>1</sup> Hence the grounds for a particularly intimate connection between culture and race within the ethical foundations of multiculturalism. To keep my discussion within a manageable purview, I will not focus on the wider range of groups and forms of discrimination – gender, age, sexual orientation, and the like – that are often also considered within “multiculturalism.”

### 1 Opposition to Racism

Taylor himself is little concerned directly with racism, and with anti-racism or racial justice as a distinct element in his theoretical framework. Nevertheless, it plays some role in my critique of Taylor, and so requires at least a brief account. As I see it there are two fundamentally distinct kinds of racism, ethically speaking – superiority racism and bigotry racism. My concern here is with the former, which encompasses forms of racism in institutions and societies that involve the domination of one group by another, and the sorts of culturally shared and individual attitudes that directly rationalize such domination – that is, attitudes in which one regards some race as distinctly inferior (generally to one’s own, though there can be internalized forms of racism in which one regards one’s own race as inferior). Attitudinal superiority racism can exist outside racist structures; nor are racist structures always supported by superiority racist attitudes. So-called “institutional racism” can be perpetuated by attitudes that are fairly racially innocuous considered purely in their own right (a belief in “merit,” in just doing one’s job, in test scores as the primary criterion for selection for jobs and college admissions).

Superiority racism offends against familiar human and civic ideas of equality and equal dignity. All humans possess certain capacities – to reason, to guide one’s life by principles, to suffer and to know one is suffering, to form human attachments whose loss causes pain and grief, to have a conscience, and the like. Different theories highlight different ones of these as the basis on which all human beings are said to have a common dignity. Racism offends against that dignity by declaring one group of persons humanly inferior in some basic and fundamental ways, or by keeping (racially) unjust structures in place whose justification and implication seems to require that same sense of inferiority.<sup>2</sup>

I will explore Taylor’s notion of recognition as the basis for an ethical injunction that it be accorded to persons. I will discuss the appropriate objects of recognition, and will explore its connection to the central value in opposition to racism, namely *equality*. Taylor initially clearly distinguishes *equality*-based from *recognition*-based values. However, as his argument progresses, he imports equality into the domain of culture, illegitimately putting forth an ideal of the “equal worth of cultures,” about which he remains ambivalent but nevertheless defends in some form. I will argue that the “equal worth of cultures” is a meaningless notion that has crept into multiculturalist discourse (not only Taylor’s), serving only to obfuscate, and that it should be discarded.

I argued in an earlier work that Taylor fails to articulate opposition to racism as a value distinct from cultural recognition or respect.<sup>3</sup> Thus, Taylor both imports an equality where it does not belong (in respect to cultures), and also fails to recognize it where it does (in the arena of racism). At the same time, while Taylor articulates a value of equality as equal rights for individuals – this being the value to which he contrasts recognition – he also endeavors to subsume a fuller, more group-based equality value *under* or *within* recognition. But, I argue, this attempt fails.

### 2 Recognition

Taylor sees the acknowledgment of recognition as a recent arrival in the articulation of human needs,<sup>4</sup> though he traces its genesis in Rousseau, Herder, and Hegel. Moreover, Taylor says that members of all societies need this recognition; he portrays it as an almost trans-historical human need. However, in societies with fixed social positions into which one is born and which one seldom leaves, the recognition can be taken for granted. It is only in the relatively more fluid societies of modern democracy that this need becomes clear.

Taylor articulates two basic forms of recognition. One is a democratic form, directed toward others in regard to their sameness with oneself – for example, as equal citizens of a shared polity, as equal human beings, or as equal creatures of God. “Equal dignity” is the most common form in which Taylor states the content of this form of recognition. Of the two forms of recognition, Taylor is less interested in this one; it is not what he has in mind in the title of his essay, “The Politics of Recognition.” However, this particular idea of recognition has been developed further by Axel Honneth in his book, *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral*

*Grammar of Social Conflicts*.<sup>5</sup> Honneth sees the attributing of equality to members of a polity as having a significance beyond the institutional (especially legal) conferring of certain liberties and immunities. The acknowledgment of fellow members of the polity as having equal rights with oneself is a manner of regard in which we hold those others. This seeing of others as equals to ourselves, as possessing the human requisites for equal participation, characterizes the moral culture of a society. It is not solely – though it is necessarily – a matter of institutional arrangements. Rather, it is a manner in which citizens in a democratic polity (should) regard and treat one another. This is how it constitutes recognition.

The second form of “recognition” – the one Taylor is more interested in – is recognition directed toward a person in her *distinctiveness*, that is, with regard to her distinct identity as an individual (in contrast to the sameness of being a fellow human being, having equal dignity, and the like). Taylor sees this form of recognition as the driving force behind contemporary multiculturalism. As does Herder, on whom Taylor draws, Taylor sees both a group and an individual object of this form of recognition. Cultural groups in their distinctiveness are to be recognized, as are individuals.

Taylor does not sustain a clear differentiation between the group and the individual as objects of recognition in his subsequent discussion; but I think it is essential to do so. While multiculturalism can be seen as resting, in part, on this need for recognition in *both* individual and group venues, the ethical principle plays out somewhat differently in the two cases.

In fact, we need to distinguish *three* distinct entities, all of which have been cited (though seldom clearly distinguished) as candidates for recognition: (a) the *individual* in light of her distinct cultural identity; (b) cultural, or culturally defined, *groups*; (c) *cultures* themselves. The form of culture we, and Taylor, are concerned with here is *ethno*-culture. Multiculturalism is not generally taken to embrace, for instance, professional cultures, regional cultures, institutional cultures, neighborhood cultures, family cultures (except insofar as the latter are forms of ethno-cultures), though each of these is a genuine type of “culture” and can be deeply important to particular individuals.

The difference between the three objects of recognition is this. The first is a single individual, in light of the particular relationship she holds to her own ethno-culture. A theory of recognition need not assume that a person’s ethno-culture is *necessarily* deeply important to her. It says only that, *if it is*, it deserves recognition. A “cultural group” refers to the actual persons comprising a given cultural group – African Americans, Polish Americans, Poles, Québécois, Ethiopians. It is the group of which the

individual is a member. Finally, “culture,” that notoriously difficult concept, can be taken in this context to refer to the forms of cultural expression, folkways, ways of life, as well as the cultural “products” of a given cultural group. As we shall see, what recognition means varies depending on which is taken to be its object.

As I understand “recognition,” it is properly directed only toward *persons* (including groups of persons). It is human beings who require recognition – of their distinctive identity(ies) – for their flourishing. This would exclude cultures themselves as appropriate objects of recognition. In the literature on multiculturalism, however, one does hear talk of “recognizing cultures,” and Taylor is not entirely careful about his terminology on this point. But I take the latter locution to mean either “recognizing cultural groups” (that is, groups of persons), or to involve some other meaning of “recognition.”

### 3 Recognition of the Individual, in Light of Her Culture

What are the appropriate forms that recognition of the individual should take? This very much depends on the context. Discussions of recognition are sometimes pitched at a level of generality that masks the fact that “recognition by whom? in what context? in what regard?” are questions that must be addressed in any theory of recognition that will give us actual guidance as to how to implement its prescriptions. For example, in normal circumstances one does not need, or want, one’s cultural identity acknowledged by the subway rider next to you, or by your waiter in a restaurant. By contrast, if one’s friends fail to accord a recognition of the importance of one’s cultural identity to one, this would be a culpable failure or recognition. One may not be at all concerned, and may not even welcome, recognition from those whom one disrespects. As Honneth emphasizes, certain institutions can be important agents of recognition; but not all would be equally important.

Schools are an important venue for such recognition, as Taylor notes. This is so for several reasons – school curriculum implicates different ethno-racial groups, school social and interpersonal life is often organized along ethno-racial lines, pedagogical practice must be sensitive to ethno-cultural identities. Taylor also mentions that schools, and curricula, can reflect demeaning images of ethno-cultural groups. Partly because of its importance, and partly to pin down one particular venue for exploring issues of recognition, this essay will focus on schools. I will draw particularly on an ethnography concerning students’ identities in schools,

*Making and Molding Identity in Schools: Student Narratives on Race, Gender, and Academic Engagement* by Ann Locke Davidson.<sup>6</sup>

Davidson provides numerous examples of recognition-related issues. She interviews a Mexican American student, a recent immigrant, whom she calls Marbella Sanchez. Recognition of her Mexican American cultural identity is very important to Marbella. In her "foods" class, Marbella speaks Spanish to her non-Spanish-speaking teacher, Mrs Everett. "We [meaning her small group of friends] have a rule. On Tuesdays and Thursdays we speak only Spanish" (p. 56). Marbella in no way resists the learning of English; on the contrary, she sees it as the path to opportunity. But she wants her Mexican-related identity to be recognized, as contrasting distinctly with those of the dominant Anglo group of students in the school, and Mrs Everett acknowledges it.

Davidson gives other examples of *lack* of recognition, this time directed toward the Spanish-speaking students in the school as a group. The school bulletin (always posted and occasionally read) is only in English, never in Spanish. Spanish-speaking students can not get into classes qualifying them for the honor society. An awards ceremony at the end of the year for high-achieving Spanish-speaking students is limited to them and their families, and is distinct from what is taken as the "regular" awards ceremony for the school as a whole. "The achievements of the immigrants were not made part of the public school discourse, keeping evidence of their existence hidden from European American and English-speaking Latino peers" (p. 69).

Taylor mentions a further, higher-profile, issue of curricular recognition of concern to the cultural group in question, for example Mexican Americans – their historical experiences. Such curriculum-based recognition must be bounded by an intellectual rationale for such inclusion. We cannot pretend that, for example, the experience of Cambodian Americans, almost all of whom have arrived since 1975, possesses the same historical significance as that of Mexican Americans.<sup>7</sup> As Taylor notes, the *educational* rationale – presenting all students (from varied ethno-cultural backgrounds) with a portrayal of their shared national history in which a particular group's experience is adequately and properly reflected – is distinct from the *recognition* rationale directed specifically at the cultural group in question.<sup>8</sup>

What does recognition consist in with regard to the individual as a member of a cultural group? The obvious feature is according explicit acknowledgement to the cultural marker or markers that the individual regards as indicating her distinctive cultural identity (for Marbella, this was speaking Spanish in a non-Spanish class). Cultural markers can be indi-

vidualized; so recognition should take account of what the particular individual sees as signifying her distinct cultural identity. For example speaking Spanish is *not* a cultural marker for non-Spanish-speaking Mexican Americans, and they may experience an expectation that they will speak or understand Spanish as non recognition and even insult. Yet this cultural identity may be important to them, and may be indicated, in particular cases, by foods, types of music (Mexican, "tejano"), dance, an interest in Mexico, features of Mexican-American youth culture, and the like.

Regarding cultural groups, individualized knowledge is of course not possible; and recognition will have to consist in what can reasonably be taken to be cultural markers and corresponding recognition – for example, inclusion in school-wide venues in which academic awards are presented, putting notices in Spanish, including Mexican-American historical experience in the curriculum.<sup>9</sup>

Who is it who does the recognizing? There are different appropriate agents of recognition – the larger institution itself (e.g. the school), particular teachers (e.g. Mrs Everett), fellow students in the school.

#### 4 Recognition and Value

Recognition of the individual and cultural group is a way of acknowledging someone in her or their (here, cultural) distinctness. It does not, however, require that the identity component in question (ethno-culture) be accorded a distinct worth or value apart from its worth *to the individual or group in question*. It requires only an acceptance, a certain legitimacy within the context in question. When Marbella wants to assert herself as a Spanish-speaker, and wants her teacher to acknowledge the legitimacy of her speaking Spanish, this is not the same as wishing for a declaration that the Spanish language, or Mexican culture, has value in Taylor's sense, namely that it possesses a value that applies to those outside the culture, and can be appreciated from outside the culture. That type of value "has something to say to all human beings," as Taylor puts it ("The Politics of Recognition," p. 66). Marbella simply wants recognition of the value, importance, and meaningfulness of her Mexican-American cultural identity *to her*.

This point holds as well for broadcasting the daily bulletin in Spanish, or holding assemblies that showcase the immigrant students. The message in doing so (if the school were to do it) is not to declare that the Spanish language is a good language or that Mexican-American culture has a

distinct value; it is merely to recognize the Spanish-speaking students as a distinct cultural group whose presence in the school warrants full acknowledgement along with the Anglo students.<sup>10</sup>

The idea that the agents of recognition ought to be constantly engaged in assessing the value of every cultural marker they find it appropriate to recognize is, in fact, a quite bizarre suggestion.

This point holds as well for curriculum inclusion. To study the experience of a *cultural group* within its national context is to *recognize* the cultural group. This does not require declaring the *culture* of that group to be of (Taylorian) *value*. Of course, one may also say that the culture has produced objects of value – either to the world at large (certain kinds of literature, or music, for example), or to the larger national life (Mexican-American leaders, inventors, and the like). In any concrete case of a major ethnic group, we will certainly have both reasons for portraying the group in question within the curriculum. But the point is that there are two distinct reasons: one is recognition of the cultural group as a distinct group of persons, the other an assessment of value in a culture itself.<sup>11</sup> (The issue of cultural value will be discussed further below.)

The historical experience of a *cultural group* that is appropriate for curricular inclusion, and that addresses the legitimate desire for recognition, is not always itself focused on the group's actual *culture*. Take African Americans as an example. If, for instance, a curriculum accords attention only to forms of African-American music, religion, art, and literature in the context of various historical developments within the African-American community, it would have omitted an important dimension of the historical experience of African Americans, namely their having been enslaved, segregated, and generally discriminated against in systemic ways for hundreds of years.

I am not making the obvious point that a responsible presentation of American history requires attention to the oppression of African Americans; but rather that the value of *recognition* as applied to African Americans as a group should encompass not just “cultural” matters strictly or narrowly defined, but issues of historical experience bound up with racist subordination. One does not give due recognition to African Americans without attending to this history of subordination and its concomitant experience.

It might be replied that in my initial breakdown of the objects of recognition, “cultural groups” was one of the items; but “African American” is, as it were, ambiguous as between a cultural group and a racial group; and in my argument here I am implicitly treating it as a racial group rather than a cultural group.

To this I have two responses. First, the cultural and the political/social cannot be so readily disentangled in the case of many groups, certainly including African Americans. So much of what I mentioned above as *cultural* expressions of black culture is bound up with resistance to, or otherwise coming to terms with, racist oppression. Black Christianity, to take another important example, was a racist and colonialist *imposition* on American blacks, part of a deliberate attempt to eradicate their indigenous African religions. On the other hand, Black Christianity very much bears the stamp of black creativity in giving this imposed religion a distinctive character; moreover, it became at various points a central locus for resistance to racist subordination. Various forms of black music – spirituals, blues, rap – are also deeply implicated in the experience of racist oppression. So there can be no clear separation between politics and culture in the case of African Americans. And this is true to *some* extent of every American group that has suffered discrimination or subordination (Latinos of various groups, Jews, Native Americans, Asian Americans).

Second, we must remember the distinction between a cultural group and a culture, for both of which the issue of acknowledgement of distinctiveness is raised. African Americans as a distinct group of persons are to be distinguished from the culture of African Americans. It is the former who warrant recognition, just as do the immigrant Mexican-American students at the school Ann Davidson studied. Part of doing so means giving due recognition to the *distinctive* historical and current experience of their group. But in *both* cases (though Davidson's example does not address this point directly) part of what is to be *recognized* is the group's historical experience of subordination, resistance and accommodation to it, and the like. As long as our concern is the “cultural group” and not the “culture” itself, then, even if one could draw a distinction between the “race-based” and the “culture-based” dimensions of that experience (which I have argued above one cannot, or mostly cannot), the race-based part would still have to be encompassed in what is to be taken into account in meeting the recognition need.<sup>12</sup>

Returning to the original point then, recognition need involve no evaluative judgment at all, nor is it particularly appropriate, or even natural, to engage in assessing the culture of the student or the cultural group, when all that is at stake is recognizing that forms of cultural expression, and historical experiences, of the cultural group are important to that student, and that in the context of a school, they warrant an institutional acknowledgment.

## 5 Taylor on Recognition and Equal Worth

Though recognition does not entail finding value (except to the group itself), Taylor's discussion ties recognition closely to the *assessment* of the individual or group's culture as having "equal worth." So, when Taylor shifts from special rights for the Québécois and Quebec grounded in a legitimate interest in cultural survival (in section IV of his essay), to *recognition* of, say, French-speaking residents of Quebec (in section V), he says, "the further demand we are looking at here is that we all *recognize* the equal value of different cultures; that we not only let them survive, but acknowledge their worth" (p. 64). And further on in his argument, discussing specifically education-based demands for recognition, Taylor says, "Although it is not often stated clearly, the logic behind some of these demands seems to depend on a premise that we owe equal respect to all cultures" (p. 66).

Why does Taylor think that the logic of the demand for recognition of the cultural group leads to requiring a judgment of equal value of the culture? Taylor never makes this clear; yet the thrust of his argument earlier in the essay provides a clue as to why he regards recognition of equal value of different cultures as a central prop of the politics of difference. For he wants to argue that the more familiar Enlightenment idea of *equal dignity* of individuals became wedded to and transformed into equal respect for distinct cultures (and for distinctness more generally), and this is only a short step to "equal respect to actually evolved cultures" (p. 42).

Yet in articulating a notion of recognition, we must reject at the outset "equal valuing of distinct cultures" as a legitimate, and even intelligible, expression of a defensible multiculturalism, and deny that it is entailed by recognition of distinct cultural identity of individuals and cultural groups.

The injunction to value all cultures equally runs into three insuperable obstacles. First, it presumes that every culture can be regarded as the sort of totality to which a measure of value can be assigned. But what is *the value* of Mexican culture, of Anglo-American culture, of Ethiopian culture, of Polish-American culture? (I am intentionally mixing ethno-cultures with national cultures here, as all of these have come in for the "equal respect" injunction.) What could be the basis of assigning one overall value to a way of life that includes rituals, beliefs, modes of personal interaction, artistic production, and the like?<sup>13</sup>

A second difficulty is that, even independent of the "total cultural

value" assumption, the "equal value" assumption further presumes that cultures can be unproblematically *compared* with respect to the values they realize. One ground for rejecting this assumption is a thorough-going relativism according to which either (a) cultures can never be compared with respect to value in any way, as there can be no standards of value outside a given culture; or (b) even if common standards could not in theory be rejected, no one could ever be in a position to be certain that she is in possession of them; so no one would ever be in a position to make the requisite comparison. According to either scenario, we would never be justified in making comparisons of value between different cultures.

I would want to reject this thorough-going relativism. I agree with Taylor's view that different cultures produce things of value to human beings in general, and that persons from cultures other than the one in question can come to recognize that value. Often doing so involves an expansion of one's scheme of values that arises from gaining an extensive understanding of another culture and what it finds valuable, and thinking that perspective through in light of and in comparison with one's own scheme of values. Taylor borrows from Gadamer the expression "fusion of horizons" to express how this new value framework which allows appreciation of the value of cultures other than one's own arises.

Yet, even accepting these points and rejecting full-scale relativism, the assumption that the cultural products and forms of life of distinct cultures *can always* be compared as to their value is certainly questionable. Can traditional Thai forms of dance be compared with Irish ones as to their overall value? Can we be sure that the literary forms of West Africans, French, and Slavs can be evaluatively compared in any overall way? It seems unlikely. And if we cannot do so with forms of artistic production of roughly the same character, how much less can we do so with cultural products of diverse characters, and, even less, with the complex and amorphous "ways of life" dimension of all distinct cultures?<sup>14</sup>

The idea that we can either affirm or deny an overall evaluative ranking of cultures depends on a much more extensive evaluative comparison among cultures than could ever intelligibly be undertaken. Hence, the idea that cultures have "equal worth" remains barely intelligible, and is certainly unable to be operationalized, even independent of the first assumption, that overall expressions of value can be attached to cultures as a whole.

A third difficulty with the "equal value" position is that it cannot coherently provide the content for an injunction to accord recognition or respect to other cultures. As Thomas Sowell says, derisively commenting on the multiculturalist goal of respect:

History cannot be prettified in the interests of promoting "acceptance" or "mutual respect" among peoples and cultures. There is much in the history of every people that does not deserve respect. Whether with individuals or with groups, respect is something earned, not a door prize handed out to all. It cannot be prescribed by third parties... "Equal respect" is an internally contradictory evasion. If everything is respected equally, then the term respect has lost its meaning.<sup>15</sup>

Sowell overstates his point by presuming that respect must always be directed toward positive achievement and attainment; that is only *one kind of respect*. As we saw in our discussion of anti-racism, a notion of "equal dignity" of individuals underlies the moral wrong of superiority-based racism; respect for that equal dignity would be a kind of "equal respect." However, equal respect for cultures is a different matter, since while every individual human being can be presumed to possess whatever qualities ground equal dignity (for example, the capacity for reason or morality, as Kant thought), respect for cultures as Sowell implies, does require attributing distinctive positive characteristics to cultures or cultural products.

Taylor, too, is concerned with how cultural respect can be made an object of moral demand. Taylor heaps scorn on those (if there are any such) who would shun the idea of cultural value altogether, collapsing the demand for cultural respect into a mere assertion of a valueless (and, Taylor argues, insulting and patronizing) solidarity with previously devalued or excluded cultures (p. 78). Taylor recognizes that one must actually apprehend value in another culture in order to accord it genuine (as opposed to spurious) respect. Yet how can the apprehension of equivalent value be an object of moral demand? Apart from the earlier arguments that the notion of "equivalent value" is barely intelligible, even if it *did* make sense, people cannot be morally enjoined to find value in something.

Three difficulties, then, plague the attempt to make "equal respect" in the form of a finding or declaring of "equal value" in every culture an expression of multiculturalism as an ethical norm: (1) cultures cannot be assigned overall, summary values, such as could be compared with the values of other cultures; (2) even "portions" of cultures cannot always be compared to something like analogous "portions" of other cultures, as the finding of "equal value" requires; (3) even if, *per impossible*, two cultures did have equal value (that is, value to "the world," to those outside the culture), their apprehension could not be made an object of ethical demand.

## 6 Respect, Value, and Equal Value

Must we, then, abandon cultural value as a component of multiculturalism? Fortunately not. There remains a form of "cultural respect" that survives the three criticisms above. This is the view that every ethnic or national culture contains something of distinctive value "to the world" – value that is able to be appreciated by those outside of that culture.

This form of cultural respect avoids the defects of the "equal respect" view. It presumes no overall total value of a given culture, but only that it contains something of value. It does not require comparison with other cultures, but simply treats each culture in its own right. Finally, it does not require a finding of equal value, such as could not be made an object of ethical injunction – but only of *some* value (something of value). This does not mean that the view declares cultures to be of unequal value, while accepting *some* value as sufficient. Rather, it rejects the comparison between or among cultures as meaningless. So cultures are seen neither as equal nor as unequal. The whole dimension of equivalence and non-equivalence of value drops out of the picture entirely.

Yet even the latter may seem to pose a problem, expressed in (3) above. How can we ethically demand that an individual find value in a culture? Taylor addresses this very point in a justly famous passage in which he says that every culture should be accorded a presumption that it possesses such value:

Merely on the human level, one could argue that it is reasonable to suppose that cultures that have provided the horizon of meaning for large numbers of human beings, of diverse characters and temperaments, over a long period of time – that have, in other words, articulated their sense of the good, the holy, and the admirable – are almost certain to have something that deserves our admiration and respect, even if it is accompanied by much that we have to abhor and reject (pp. 72–3).

How does this presumption provide a foundation for a moral injunction? The moral injunction would seem to be "Take up a stance toward other cultures in which one shows interest in those cultures and presumes that further knowledge will reveal to one the value(s) they embody, and which one is capable of appreciating." To put it another way, the injunction is to avoid both ethnocentrism and an indifferent ignorance in one's view of other cultures. These formulations construe the content of the injunction as something that one engages in, rather than as the adoption of a mental state of assessment that cannot be summoned through personal agency.



Even while providing this important basis for the appreciation of value, Taylor confuses the matter by continuing his practice of conflating the issue of *equal* worth with that of *some* worth. So he prefaces the long passage quoted above by saying, "What there is is the presumption of equal worth I described above: a stance we take in embarking on a study of the other." (p. 72).

This linking of recognition or respect (not to equate these two) with equal valuing is not a mere idiosyncrasy of Taylor's. It shows up quite regularly in discussions of multiculturalism. One of its sources is a reaction to the ethnocentrism of Euro-Americans assuming that European civilization is the repository of all, or almost all, of what civilization has produced in the way of value. When a school district in Florida passed a resolution that "American" culture was superior to any other world culture (and also, by implication, to any of the non-white ethno-cultures within the US), many were rightly outraged at the arrogance of this position.<sup>16</sup> The idea that no culture is superior to any other – that all cultures are *equal* in value – might seem a reasonable statement of the view underlying this reaction.

My suggestion is that we resist countering assertions of superiority of cultures with assertions of equality. Rather, we should challenge the intelligibility of making the former assertions at all, and proceed to examine the specific bases the speaker proposes for having made the assertion of superiority:

- 1 Often, for example, the *practice* of a "third world" culture (e.g. female circumcision, or infibulation) will have been compared with an *ideal* that is part of the political culture of the speaker (e.g. gender equality).
- 2 The Florida district that originally passed the "superiority of American culture" directive had in mind "the free market system and Constitutional liberty" as part of its conception of American culture. Is it not misleading to subsume political and economic systems under an idea of "culture?"
- 3 Moreover, the district Board does *not* say that children need to be taught the extraordinary inequalities in wealth, income and life prospects among Americans, or our widespread poverty, among the worst of any industrialized nation. If the distinction between economy, polity, and culture is to be soft-pedaled, do not these matters have equal claim on curricular attention as part of "American culture?"

If we decouple "equality" and "culture," the former does have an

important role to play in multiculturalism – in the anti-racist, or more generally, anti-discrimination, branch of multiculturalism discussed earlier, as well as in the idea that each individual is, equally, owed recognition in her distinctness. Taylor articulates the worry that women and students from previously (or currently) excluded groups have been given a demeaning picture of themselves (p. 65). They, and other such groups, have responded by saying that indeed they are the equals of those who devalue them. This is an assertion of *equality*, and it can become a political demand that that equality be respected. So the demand for equal respect gets taken up within the ethical injunctions of multiculturalism.<sup>17</sup>

Yet Taylor frames this concern for equal respect within the framework of "recognition of distinctiveness," by speaking of a group's wishing to avoid a demeaning image of themselves being reflected back to them, of the members' need to struggle for a form of recognition of their distinct identity that is not demeaning. (On page 65 Taylor cites Frantz Fanon as an earlier theorist of this concern). But it is misleading of Taylor to see the concern for respect as an equal as a type of "concern for recognition of distinctiveness." A concern not to be seen as inferior, that one's image in the larger culture or institution not be a degraded one, is not the same as the need for recognition of one's distinct identity in the first place – the need to be seen, to be acknowledged as who one is. The former concern is much more properly regarded as what Taylor calls "democratic recognition" than "distinctiveness recognition."<sup>18</sup>

As I mentioned above (p. 75), while Taylor's historical account of the genesis of the human need for recognition allows two importantly distinct strands, in fact as his essay proceeds the democratic/sameness-based recognition falls away as a *type of recognition*. The focus on democratic recognition recedes to the background. Recognition comes to be identified with "recognition of distinctness, or difference." While the issue of democratic sameness remains, it loses its deeper connection with forms of recognition – becoming, instead, an institutional structure that grants people *equal rights as individuals*, or, more generally, difference-blind norms for social policy.

This is clearest in Taylor's famous discussion of whether the Québécois should, for the purpose of protecting their distinct French-speaking culture, be accorded certain privileges and immunities not accorded to English-speaking Canadians. There, sameness-based liberalism is identified with granting all individuals the same rights (of which language schools to send their children, in what language to write commercial signs, and the like) with the implication of denying any special status to the Québécois cultural group.

But the desire to be acknowledged in one's cultural distinctiveness is not the same as the desire to be seen as an *equal*. Subordinated groups struggling for recognition retain this dual focus, of which Taylor loses sight; on the one hand they want their distinctive culture acknowledged, on the other they want to be seen as not-inferior. In think part of what throws Taylor off from sustaining this duality throughout the essay is his identification of equality with a purely *individualistic* basis – equal rights for individuals. This means that when he focuses on particular *groups* and their need for recognition, the sameness/equality dimension threatens to disappear.<sup>19</sup>

The form of equality that is pertinent to multiculturalism as it is applied to groups, then, is an acceptance of groups, and members of those groups, as equals. But we have to be clear in what sense these groups are seen as equals. It cannot be, as I have argued above, that their *cultures* are equal; this, I argued, was meaningless. It can only be that they are the kind of groups who, having been denied full human equality, are demanding to be granted it. The groups in question that Taylor mentions are gender and racial groups. I would add, as a usefully illustrative case, groups defined by sexual orientation. In these cases, the demand is that their distinguishing characteristic – “race,” gender, sexual orientation – should *not* be taken as a badge of inferiority or deficiency. It is not that they wish to jettison the distinguishing characteristic. As I am envisioning these groups, their group identity as blacks, women, lesbians, is very important to their members' sense of individual identity. They wish this identity component to be recognized. But their concern here is that the identity component should not be taken to mark them as inferior.

There are two forms of equality then, not unrelated, which *are* appropriate to multiculturalism broadly construed (embracing anti-racism or anti-discrimination more generally). One is the purely individualistic notion of equal dignity – one which drives Taylor's discussion of the alternative conception to “recognition of difference” and which Sowell implicitly denies in his derisive criticism of a notion of “equal respect for cultures.” A second, closely related, is a desire for groups as groups, or as members of groups, for their group membership not to be taken as a badge of inferiority.

The difference between the two could be put in this way: the first says, for example, “I am black and have no desire to deny this, nor would I wish to be anything other than black. I am a human being who happens to be black and it is as a *human being* that I declare myself the moral equal of any other human being.” The second, by contrast, would say, “It is *as* black that I declare myself the moral equal of a person of any other race,

especially white.”<sup>20</sup> It is this second form that Taylor's account omits.

Yet if we abandon “equal cultural value” are we not still left with the problem that unless an *individual* student's own culture is seen as equal to that of her peers, she will herself feel unequal? No, we are not. As Taylor says, the problem arises when a student is presented with a demeaning picture of her culture. Such a demeaning picture is one that declares the culture unworthy, or paltry compared to other cultures on the scene. But if we accept Taylor's presumption of value, then no culture need be portrayed as wholly or largely unworthy or demeaning, even if it might contain practices that a student may come to feel are, in Taylor's words, “abhorrent,” or at least shameful.

A pupil is not psychically damaged simply from the failure of her ethno-culture to be declared equal to that of other ethno-cultures, but only if it is distinctly portrayed in a demeaning light. Or, to modify this point, since multiculturalist discourse has sometimes encouraged the idea that cultures must be declared equal, some students, influenced by this, may actually feel (or feel as if they feel) demeaned unless their culture is declared to be, and portrayed as, the equal of that of any other. But, as I have argued, it is the task of educators to teach multiculturalism in a way that shows the kind of respect for cultures that is appropriate to them and does not push toward a meaningless comparison between different cultures in terms of their overall value.

To summarize the argument regarding Taylor, then:

- 1 Taylor powerfully articulates the need for recognition of one's distinct identity (its presence, and its distinctness), of which culture can be one important element.
- 2 People also desire to be recognized by (appropriate) others as equals. This recognition can take a purely individual form; but it can also take a group-based form, in which the desire is that a group characteristic should not be taken as a badge of inferiority. Taylor fails to articulate this group-based form of equality recognition.
- 3 Taylor is correct to say that we can presume every culture of sufficient longevity and extent to contain something of value not only to its members but to all of humanity. However, his frequent slide from this position into the idea that all cultures are of *equal* value is a tilt toward meaninglessness, and orients multiculturalism in a counterproductive direction.

## 7 Fraser on Recognition and Equality

Nancy Fraser's impressive attempt to synthesize a range of political and intellectual concerns in a postmodern, and what she calls "post-socialist" climate, contains an implicit critique of Taylor. Analogizing "cultural injustice," whose concern is the according of recognition to the political-economic injustice of maldistribution, Fraser is concerned that both forms of injustice be given their due. She criticizes theorists like Taylor whose concerns seem to have shifted entirely toward the cultural injustice side of the spectrum, as if either (1) we no longer have reason to be concerned with economic injustice; (2) cultural injustice is more important than economic injustice; or (3) cultural injustice provides significant leverage by itself to attack the structures of power that produce economic injustice. Fraser rejects all three of these positions, emphasizing the importance of addressing structures of economic injustice independently (though in concert with, and intertwined with, addressing cultural injustice, as the two systems of injustice reinforce one another).

This part of Fraser's argument is an important corrective to Taylor, and I agree with it fully. Fraser recognizes racism as a distinct justice concern, sees its political-economic dimension, and does not attempt to subsume it within recognition concerns. So Fraser's view corrects for two deficiencies in Taylor's account: first, his failure to articulate economic/political equality as a concern distinct from valuational equality; second, his collapsing of all recognition concerns into recognition of difference.

On the first point, Taylor could perhaps reply that he was simply not concerned in his essay with economic/political inequality in its own right, but only with its relation to recognition. However, his essay concerns, in addition, the ethical character of liberal politics as a whole, and thus *should* take account of other forms of inequality as well. As I argue in "Multiculturalism, Racial Justice, and Community,"<sup>21</sup> Taylor does take some note of racial inequalities, but his discussion of it is inadequate. So he is open to the charge that Fraser lodges against a family of theorists (of whom Taylor is one) that they have come to supplant concerns for material equality with recognitional equality.

On the second point I argued above that, despite an initial attention to equality as one of the two forms of recognition, as Taylor's essay proceeds, "recognition" comes to be applied only to recognition of *difference*, implying that equality concerns are limited to the area of political rights (though, as noted, Taylor does also import an unnecessary and diverting notion of equality in relation to *culture*, which Fraser's account neither

involves nor requires). Fraser, by contrast, maintains equality as a central focus of her notion of recognition.

For Fraser, recognition in the context of her target groups – racial, gender, sexual minority groups – always concerns a group that is *devalued* within the larger society. And what recognition primarily comes to for Fraser is the *revaluing* toward a state of (valuational) equality with the corresponding currently privileged group (whites in the case of race, men in the case of gender, heterosexuals in the case of sexual orientation). Fraser distinguishes two approaches to this revaluing, affirmative and transformational. The former calls for a positive revaluing while leaving the current form of the identities in question in place, while the latter, more radical, alternative calls for an undermining of current forms of both the privileged and the undervalued forms of identity and the valuational structure underlying them. Despite the difference in approach and result, both directions aim at the same goal of equal valuing.

Yet while Fraser corrects for Taylor's failure to give the equality dimension of recognition the centrality it deserves, Fraser's view presents precisely the reverse problem – she almost entirely drops the "recognition of difference" as a matter *distinct* from equality. By this I do not mean to imply that Fraser is blind to the issue of difference; far from it. She is concerned about her target groups in their distinct identity. However, her overriding concern in *attending* to difference is how best to promote *equality*. "Which of the many varieties of identity politics best synergize with struggles for social equality? And which tend to interfere with the latter?" she asks.<sup>22</sup>

What is missing in Fraser's account is the very point on which Taylor is so convincing, and that is the need for recognition in one's individual identity as a need *distinct* from the need to be seen as an equal. The absence of concern or recognition of this point is bound up with Fraser's choice of target group. Her groups (race, gender, sexual orientation) are all *devalued* groups; their need is *no longer to be devalued*. Fraser's use of the term "cultural" to refer to the terrain in which these issues of group valuing are expressed and worked through conflates two different dimensions of the need for recognition – recognitional equality and recognitional distinctness. (Indeed, Fraser's overarching language of "justice" already tilts towards equality rather than recognitional concerns; the language of "recognitional injustice" is already a bit of a stretch.) For Fraser, cultural groups are really understood as devalued and discriminated-against identity groups.

In this regard it is significant that Fraser explicitly omits *ethnic* and *national* groups in her discussion of "identity politics". While suggesting

in footnote 2 following upon this declaration of omission that some of her analysis might apply to these sorts of groups as well, I think it is revealing that she does not include them in her core analysis of identity groups. To do so would force acknowledgment of the "cultural difference" dimension of those groups. Taylor's Québecois, for example, are concerned with recognition of their interest in maintaining a culture distinct from Canadian anglophone culture. This is not a concern for *equality* (except, as Taylor says, equal recognition of distinctiveness).

The inattention to cultural distinctness is revealed also in the devalued groups Fraser does discuss. "Racial" groups are particularly pertinent to our concerns. Fraser sees such groups (gender is another) as "bivalent collectivities," by which she means that they suffer from *both* economic/political *and* recognition-based or cultural/valuational injustices. But when Fraser describes the character of the recognition-based injustices, they all take the form of the racial group being subject to various sorts of disparagement, devaluation, and discrimination.<sup>23</sup> Omitted here is another "bivalency" – that racial groups are often also ethno-cultural groups and, as such, are concerned not only to be seen as equal human beings, but also that their distinct culture be recognized within the larger cultural/social sphere. Regarding the small example of the Mexican-American students in the school studied by Ann Locke Davidson, their concern, as Davidson presents it, is not only to be equals in the school but also to have their distinct cultural identity acknowledged. Fraser's analysis omits one entire dimension of this duality.<sup>24</sup>

Fraser's analytical framework separates "distributional" issues from "recognitional" ones. Fraser states at the outset that this distinction is made for analytical purposes only, and should not be allowed to mask the fact that the two sorts of issues, or domains, are intertwined. Indeed, part of the point of Fraser's essay is to reveal the connections between these two domains.

But the framework itself is more misleading than Fraser recognizes. One could equally well structure a discussion of the morality of politics and culture around a *different* duality, one that cross-cuts Fraser's – between equality concerns (of either a recognitional or economic sort) and cultural distinctness (of either a recognitional or economy-related sort). In a sense, the duality that Fraser articulates in her "bivalent collectivities" such as race and gender are both manifestations of the same thing – the desire, need, or demand to be *treated as an equal*. Blacks deserve to be treated as equals; to do so involves economic, political, social, representational, and cultural spheres. Moreover, these spheres are not readily separable from one another, in a way that Fraser's analytical separation masks.

At the same time, recognition of distinctness has both an attitudinal dimension – a purely interpersonal dimension of recognition – and a material dimension, such as the provision of state resources for cultural preservation and expression or laws governing the language in which commercial activity is to be transacted (to advert to Taylor's discussion). *Both* the attitudinal and the material are, or can be seen as, expressive of an underlying unity, that of *recognizing cultural distinctness*; just as the many interpenetrating domains mentioned immediately prior can all be seen as forms expressing the underlying principle of *treating people as equals*.

Thus, Fraser's choice of an analytic framework framed by the polarities of material/distributional and recognitional has the effect of masking an equally significant "bivalency" – between equality and distinctness. It calls into question Fraser's claim that her two domains operate according to "distinctive logics" that it is the goal of her essay to delineate.

That Fraser's analytic division between distributional and recognitional is problematic can be seen by focusing on the particular domain of the *legal/political*. That domain does not fit very clearly into either Fraser's conception of "distribution" or that of "recognition." At first, Fraser refers to the former domain as "political-economic," and that nominal equation persists throughout the essay. Nevertheless, when Fraser spells out what she means by this domain, it is described almost entirely in economic terms, related to the market, the division of labor, and the material resources produced in the economic sphere. Indeed, the metaphor of "distribution" is much more naturally an economic than a political one, and Fraser's view of *class* as the fundamental group-based division of this sphere comports with the economic emphasis.

Of course, economics cannot be separated from politics; but each conveys a different emphasis, and Fraser clearly has the economic more strongly in mind. Moreover, when Fraser enumerates specific forms of "cultural-valuational" injustices suffered by racial groups, some of what she includes is straightforwardly political/legal ("denial of full legal rights and equal protections") or suggestive of the political ("exclusion from and/or marginalization in public spheres and deliberative bodies"). Other injustices mentioned by Fraser in this section (harassment, discrimination, violence) hardly seem paradigm cases of either "purely recognitional" injustices or "distributional" ones.

The domain of the political is an especially central one in which "recognition of equality" plays a part, as Honneth spells out in his book *The Struggle for Recognition* and which Habermas develops in his essay "Struggles for Recognition in the Democratic State" in Gutmann's

Multiculturalism. Yet Fraser's analysis gives it no comfortable home.<sup>25</sup> The lesson I suggest we draw from this, taken together with the other injustices that do not fit very well into either category of her dyad, is that there is something importantly misleading about an analytical framework organized around the concepts of "distributational" and "cultural/valuational," because some important injustices do not fit comfortably into either one, the entire domain of the *political* being a prime example; because these omissions suggest something much closer to a continuum, or even a complex interdependence; and, finally, because, at another level, the injustices with which Fraser is concerned all reflect a fundamental concern with treating persons as equals.

Thus, in summary, I have argued that while Fraser's analysis corrects Taylor's undertheorizing of the equality dimension of group recognition, Fraser makes an error entirely complementary to Taylor's, masking the entire issue of recognition of cultural distinctness. This omission is linked to a larger problem in Fraser's entire analytic framework. What she sees as a fundamental duality can, in another framing, be seen as two expressions of one pole of *another* duality – equality, counterposed to the omitted concern for distinctness.<sup>26</sup>

### Notes

- 1 David Hollinger, *PostEthnic America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995).
- 2 *Bigotry* racism is distinct from superiority racism and I will not be discussing it here. A person can be bigoted against a person of another race without thinking him inferior; Jews and Asians have often been targets of racial bigotry while being thought of as threats, and as in some important ways superior (thought, at the same time, both groups, and especially Jews, have also been thought of as *morally* inferior). Jorge Garcia's "The Heart of Racism," *Journal of Social Philosophy*, winter 1996, has convinced me that not all racism is concerned with superiority and inferiority. Laurence Thomas makes a similar distinction between hatred and superiority racism ("The Evolution of Anti-Semitism," *Transition*, no 57, p. 107ff) and uses this framework to distinguish between racism against Jews (anti semitism) and racism against blacks. While I am in accord with his general analysis, there is a good deal of racial hatred against blacks, and not all contemporary forms of anti-black racism are tied up with beliefs in black inferiority.
- 3 L. Blum, "Multiculturalism, Racial Justice, and Community: Reflections on Charles Taylor's 'The Politics of Recognition,'" in L. Foster and P. Herzog (eds), *Defending Diversity: Contemporary Philosophical Perspectives on Pluralism and Multiculturalism* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994).

- 4 Taylor ties the need for this recognition to a theory about how identity is formed, namely through interaction and recognition by others – a "dialogic" view of the self. But I wish to disaggregate these two strands. We can recognize that a person can be caused a kind of substantial harm through being seen as an inferior, or not seen at all – that is, through forms of failed recognition – and can acknowledge that this harm is caused in part through the individual's internalizing the other's view (or non-view) of her; we can accept this without buying into the larger idea that our entire identities are formed fully through dialogue with others. It is not that I definitively reject the latter view. But it seems to me to go substantially beyond what is actually required in the way of a theory of identity sufficient to ground the ethical principles with which I am concerned. I believe, moreover, that Taylor's view of the need for recognition is not itself as dependent on his theory of the dialogical self as he thinks it is.
- 5 Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1995).
- 6 Ann Locke Davidson, *Making and Molding Identities in Schools: Student Narratives on Race, Gender, and Academic Engagement* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1996).
- 7 Nevertheless, in a school with an appreciable contingent of Cambodian students, it would be appropriate to find some way to give curricular and/or non-curricular recognition to this group.
- 8 In this spirit, David Hollinger cautions us not to read the current ethno-racial demographics of a class, school, or society back into history. See Hollinger, *PostEthnic America*, p. 125.
- 9 Some literature on recognition implies that cultures are static and relatively unchanging. Indeed, Taylor's discussion of French Canadian culture in Quebec, and his general notion of cultural recognition, could be taken in this way, though other interpretations are possible. But the notion of a "cultural marker" more clearly suggests the changeable and variable character of cultures themselves, as well as the different significances they may have for individuals. The value of "cultural recognition" should not allow itself to be captured by cultural conservatives and traditionalists. As Will Kymlicka points out in *Liberalism, Community, and Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), the values of cultural preservation, respect, and recognition can be framed so as to be neutral between more and less traditional understandings of the culture in question.
- 10 Of course, a material dimension is at stake here as well, bearing on an equality of opportunity value that has little to do with recognition. If the broadcasting of the messages is confined to English, some of the immigrant Spanish-speaking students will not have the same access to important information as the native English-speaking students. This matter is distinct from the more psychologically based "need for recognition" with which Taylor is concerned.
- 11 Susan Wolf makes something very close to this point in her "Comment" on

Taylor's essay in Gutmann, *Multiculturalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994, pp. 80ff.); only she does not clearly distinguish the cultural group from the culture.

12 Favoring curricular recognition of different ethno-cultural racial groups need not commit us to any specific form of that recognition. In particular, it does not take sides on the important curricular dispute as to (a) whether this recognition is best accomplished through distinct "ethnic studies" programs, that offer courses focused as much as possible on particular ethno-racial-cultural groups, or that place modular units of that character within social studies or history courses; or (b) whether historical understanding and inclusion is better accomplished through a more integrated approach that weaves the ethnic history into its context in the larger history of the nation, of diasporic movements of that group, or world history. While I personally favor the latter approach, the argument presented in this essay does not engage this important curricular issue.

13 Suppose we abandon the "cardinal number" version of the view in question, and weaken the principle slightly to this: "I can't assign a distinct numerical value to Anglo-American culture, but I can say that Mexican culture is equal in value to it." This would barely be an improvement. What could be the basis for a claim of that sort?

14 This is not to deny that an individual deeply knowledgeable about two different cultures could make *some* judgments of comparative value regarding particular products of the two distinct cultures. Let us keep in mind, however, that frequently those who confidently assert the superiority of Western, or American, culture are not such knowledgeable persons, but are generally ignorant of the cultures whose inferiority they proclaim, knowing only, for example, that (some members) engage in objectionable practices such as infibulation, that their governments are too quick to jail dissidents, that some members have been known to burn brides whose dowries they deem insufficient, or that they have widespread poverty. The latter facts are hardly bases on which the total superiority of one entire culture to another could be asserted; and, as various commentators have pointed out, the focus on abhorrent and objectionable practices of some members of other cultures yields certain moral and intellectual dangers: (1) Generalizing from single practices to the moral character of a culture as a whole; (2) mistaking cultural for political practices, and (3) diverting attention from deficiencies in the social, political, or cultural systems of those making the invidious comparisons.

15 Thomas Sowell, *Migrations and Cultures: A World View* (New York: Basic Books, 1996), pp. ix-x.

16 See "Fla. Union Vows to Fight District's 'Americanism' Policy," *Education Week*, May 25, 1994.

17 We should recognize, however, that not everyone appears to be concerned about what images the wider culture has of them, *nor* about recognition of distinctness. While this may be a minority consciousness within any devalued group, some people gain their recognition and esteem from other reference

groups and are concerned only about equal, non-discriminatory access to opportunities such as housing, employment, education, public accommodations, and the like—not about how or whether others outside those groups see them. I think this fact does require some adjustment in Taylor's general thesis about the need for recognition; but it does not undermine it entirely, since those individuals perhaps still require recognition from *some* persons.

18 Beyond this point, but related to it, while Taylor closely links the need for recognition with the desire that the image of one's group not be portrayed in a demeaning fashion, the two things are distinct. A person could be concerned that *if* her group were portrayed in public venues, such as film, advertisements, and school curricula, these portrayals not be demeaning; yet the person may not care if the group were actually publicly represented in the first place. This would be a concern *not to be demeaned*, but not a concern *to be recognized*.

Moreover, Taylor overstates the degree to which members of devalued groups actually internalize the devaluing to which they may be subject. A person who is entirely secure in her own esteem and sense of worth could still be concerned that the larger culture portrays a negative view of her group. She need not feel devalued herself in order to object to demeaning public portrayals of her group. For more on this criticism of Taylor, see Blum, "Multiculturalism, Racial Justice, and Community."

19 The disappearance of group-based desires for recognition-as-equals can be seen in Taylor's discussion of affirmative action (p. 40). There, Taylor discusses attempts by the politics of equality/sameness to encompass the seemingly threatening politics of difference. One form of "difference recognizing" politics that Taylor agrees *can* be encompassed within standard universalistic liberal egalitarian sameness policies is affirmative action (which Taylor misleadingly calls "reverse discrimination"). It can be encompassed because such policies can be understood as temporary measures to compensate for historical group-based disadvantages and bring these groups to the same starting point where they can then compete *as individuals* in a color-blind fashion.

Absent in this discussion (though not inconsistent with what Taylor actually says) is a recognition that blacks and women may see affirmative action as consistent with, and an extension of, other anti-discrimination policies which do more than provide a "color-blind" level playing field for individuals independent of their race and gender. Rather, they see these policies as affirming the *equality* of blacks to whites, women to men, in the face of a culture which still does not fully accept that equality. That is, the policies can be seen as taking a group-based identity and conferring on it the recognition of democratic equality that Taylor speaks about in his early general discussion but loses once he begins focusing on group identities. Democratic measures (including affirmative action) are not about affirming distinctness in its own right; they are, however, about recognizing distinctness but claiming equality for it.

Ironically, in Taylor's later discussion of groups like blacks and women

and their desires for recognition, he recognizes that these identities can be deeply significant and more way-stations to a color-blind level playing field. As we saw earlier, one of the ways that a cultural group gains an appropriate kind of recognition is through its distinct historical experience being recognized. African Americans and Latinos wish that experience to be recognized, and they see its acknowledgment as part of an appropriate exemplification of Taylor's notion of recognition. However, what makes that experience distinctive is that it is so deeply shaped by the denial of that group's human equality. Taylor misses this because he thinks of distinctiveness solely in terms of *cultural* distinctiveness, rather than a distinctiveness (of experience) that is intimately connected with *inequality*.

20 Cf. Appiah, "Identity, Authenticity, Survival: Multicultural Societies and Social Reproduction" in Gutmann, *Multiculturalism*, p. 161.

21 Blum, pages 191–5.

22 "From Redistribution to Recognition?" p. 20, this volume. Fraser echoes this concern as central to her general intellectual stance in the following quote from another essay, "Multiculturalism, Antisocialism, and Radical Democracy" in *Justice Interruptus: Critical Reflections on the "Postsocialist" Condition* (Routledge, 1997), p. 186: "the crucial political questions of the day: Which identity claims are rooted in a defense of social relations of inequality and domination? And which are rooted in a challenge to such relations?" (186).

23 See p. 30: "This depreciation is expressed in a range of harms suffered by people of color, including demeaning stereotypical depictions in the media as criminal, bestial, primitive, stupid, and so on; . . . subjection to Eurocentric norms in relation to which people of color appear lesser or deviant and that work to disadvantage them, even in the absence of any intention to discriminate."

24 Fraser certainly does sometimes use the language of "recognition of distinctiveness." Such language is especially prevalent in another essay in *Justice Interruptus*, "Multiculturalism, Antisocialism, and Radical Democracy: A Genealogy of the Current Impasse in Feminist Theory." She provides a succinct historical account of the development of "difference feminism" (sometimes called "cultural feminism"). Yet Fraser (rightly I think, from a historical point of view) portrays this movement's goal as "[opposing] the undervaluing of women's worth by recognizing gender difference and revaluing femininity" (p. 176). That is, the goal is still one of *equal* valuing rather than valuing of distinctness as a good in its own right.

25 Fraser discusses "despised sexualities," groups whose state of oppression stems from cultural devaluing rather than political economic arrangements (pp. 26–7). She recognizes that gays and lesbians are discriminated against in the world of work, housing, and social benefits. But she says that since these inequalities stem from cultural devaluing, "The remedy for the injustice, consequently, is recognition, not redistribution" (p. 26). But it seems more accurate to say that the remedy is a *combination* of equal valuing and *civic equality*, the domain untheorized by Fraser. For a sustained attempt to

theorize civic equality for gays and lesbians, see Morris Kaplan, *Sexual Justice: Democratic Governance and the Politics of Desire* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

26 No doubt Fraser would reply to some of this argument that equality concerns are just *more important* than difference-recognition concerns (even allowing that the latter sometime take material forms). I agree with this position. In this sense, from a political point of view, Fraser's masking of difference concerns is less problematic than Taylor's masking of equality.

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