



concerned with autonomy but with political theory and what best comports with presuppositions embedded in the theory' (p. 74). Maybe. But for someone who seems at least partially motivated by a desire to defend not only a particular *definition* of autonomy but the *value* of autonomy in the face of increased attacks by governments throughout the world, she must be concerned, surely, whether her account of autonomy is politically attainable, and what a theory needs to look like in order for it to be a plausible response to concrete political problems. Political theory does not strike me as an enemy of philosophical rigour, here. Rather it strikes me as a process of working out exactly how much of a pure account like this we might hope for in a world in which (as she rightly points out) individuals seem more and more willing to give up some of their autonomy in order to feel more secure, more unified as a society, more inclusive, or simply less afraid.

Philip Parvin  
Trinity Hall, Cambridge, UK

### **Negotiating Diversity: Liberalism, Democracy and Cultural Difference**

Matthew Festenstein

*Polity Press, Cambridge, 2005, 197pp.*

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This is a very welcome survey of current debates in political philosophy about multiculturalism. It is welcome not only for providing an intelligible, dispassionate and illuminating summary of the very heterogeneous contributions to these debates but also for its timeliness. Now seems a very good moment indeed to be clear about the politics of cultural difference. Multiculturalism has been a hot topic in political philosophy since Kymlicka's first book in 1989; it is now and for all the self-evident reasons a hot political topic.

The book is clearly written, is thorough in its treatment of various claims and displays an impressive familiarity with a wealth of material. At the same time Festenstein presses his own particular viewpoint without letting that get in the way of a fair-minded treatment of all the usual suspects: Brian Barry, Will Kymlicka, Chandran Kukathas and Charles Taylor. Brian Barry in particular is cut down to size and plausibly exposed as far less of an intellectual threat to the politics of multiculturalism than his own rhetoric suggests.



There are obviously various ways into the topic of multiculturalism but Festenstein chooses to explore the question of what makes cultural membership valuable. Rightly it seems to me he suggests the obvious dilemma. Either cultures matter insofar as they have value for individuals in which case it might seem that there is nothing special about groups as such — rather it is whatever can serve that function for individuals; or cultures have value in themselves in which case a host of problems threaten: for instance, the risks of the illiberal treatment of individuals who dissent from the terms of membership and the difficulties of fixing an enduring identity for any collective entity.

Festenstein thinks that culture is, as he puts it, an important ingredient in our individual identities. But he also wants to insist that cultural identities are negotiated. They are not fixed but contestable and constructed. Festenstein also favours public political deliberation and it is within the space of such deliberation that the claims of identities — not only the claims to such identities but their claims upon the terms of citizenship — are negotiated. Successful deliberation requires trust and yet the pull of cultural identities is centrifugal and destabilizing. Festenstein is sceptical about an influential argument, due to David Miller, that the requisite trust must be supplied by a national identity. But then he is in fact sceptical about all the possible sources of trust even though he concludes the book with an assertion of his optimistic belief that it need not be impossible to secure.

It is a mark of the book's quality that the chapters on public deliberation and trust can be read and appreciated independently of their contribution to his overall thesis. His general approach is rationalistic and liberal in the now familiar Rawlsian sense. There are those who will maintain that he understates the scale of the problem on the grounds that cultural identities exercise their dangerously seductive pull on individuals precisely in so far as they are resistant to the processes of rational and open deliberation. Apart from the discussion of Miller, the character and normative status of national identities is little discussed, but it is probably unfair to criticize a book for failing to examine something outside its explicit brief. However particularly given the contemporary significance of Islam, something on the international nature of some cultural identities would have been welcome. It felt as though the problem of cultural membership is something that must only be dealt with within rather than also across states.

Nevertheless, this book is the intelligent general guide to the philosophy of multiculturalism that has hitherto been missing from the secondary literature.

David Archard  
Lancaster University, Lancaster, UK