The Burden of Dialogue: Illuminating Blind Spots in Taylor’s Theory of Recognition and the Ways these Affect Education

Keywords: multiculturalism, recognition, communitarianism, autonomy, Honneth A., Taylor C.

1. Introduction: Taylor’s Communitarian Argument For Multiculturalism

Two of the main justifications for multiculturalism are the communitarian argument (Taylor, 1992) and the argument from autonomy (Kymlicka, 1989, 1995). In this article, I will concentrate on Charles Taylor’s communitarian argument and claim that although one might “naturally” deduce that his call for multicultural policy demands cultural ghettoization (in terms of education, geography, language, and so in), the opposite is the case.

There is the assumption that within every society there is a dominant culture as well as a weak one, and it “logically” follows that the former empowers the latter by allowing its members to withdraw into themselves, to remain isolated and focused on preserving their identity, rather than being exposed and tested under the pressure of the dominant culture.

This paper opposes this intuitive assumption. To this end, I will not discuss and argue against Taylor’s final conclusion in support of multiculturalism; instead, I will focus on the main justification he puts forward, that of the centrality of dialogue. I believe that discussing this in what might be called a phenomenological manner can reveal the reasons why the claims of multiculturalism contrast with the intuitive assumption evoked above. I will stick to the term multiculturalism, though some would describe my final position as an intercultural approach. I do so because I focus mainly on the article “The Politics of Recognition” (1992) where Taylor uses the term ‘multiculturalism’, and also because I accept Taylor’s later position which takes interculturalism to be a subspecies of the generic term ‘multiculturalism’ (Taylor, 2012: 415). Not only that, interculturalism is often (mis)understood as aiming at integration (Taylor, 2012: 417; Loobuyck, 2018: 225), but this paper suggests an interpretation that lies somewhere between isolation and integration.

* 1. **The Communitarian Justification**

In “The Politics of Recognition” (1992) Taylor proposes an extrapolation of Hegel’s classic master-slave model which claims that individuals base their sense of self on dialectical relations of recognition with the other. Since it is widely accepted that selfhood is an essential ingredient of a good life, becoming recognized must be an existential need (Hegel 1953: 399–410; see also Kelly 1993). If it is an existential need, then it is, *ipso facto*, a feature of our human dignity: “Non-recognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being” (Taylor, 1992: 25). And since liberalism takes dignity to be a fundamental human right and basic norm, this makes recognition a liberal principle.

In extending Hegel’s model, Taylor transfers the concept of recognition to the political sphere, rather than seeing it as an intersubjective or psychological issue, and he bridges these spheres through the question of culture. In his view, personal identities are not composed only of personal stories; they also include a significant cultural component, and as such this component requires recognition too. However, unlike the personal ‘other’, in the classic dialectic of recognition, in this new equation *otherness* is a political entity. This is so because while it is a personal need, when it comes to cultures people are only samples of that culture; if they are hurt, even potentially hurt, it is not so much on a personal level, and not necessarily directly, but only inasmuch as they are considered as belonging to that culture. Furthermore, as Iris Marion Young claims, having a dominant culture alongside a subordinate culture creates an unavoidable situation of cultural imperialism as “the dominant meanings of a society render the particular perspectives of one’s own group invisible at the same time as they stereotype one’s group and mark it out as the other.” (1990: 58-59). Thus, even becoming an Other in society is to undergo a form of oppression.

As people are caged within this cultural imperialism, amendments are needed to improve the way weak cultures are publicly treated, such that, indirectly, persons belonging to these cultures might receive recognition. And since culture is practiced publicly (through physical infrastructure, cultural institutions, budgets, legal protections, institutionalization) it cannot be recognized only on the levels of consciousness and interpersonal communication; epistemic capabilities, cultural capital, and lingual capital are required to maintain that culture and ensure that it flourishes, and this, in turn, involves public institutions and shapes them accordingly.

* 1. **Being in Dialogue**

Let us now follow Taylor’s argument in detail. The crux of Taylor’s argument is the place of dialogue within the process of recognition: “The crucial feature of human life is its dialogical character. We become full human agents, capable of understanding ourselves, and hence of defining our identity, through our acquisition of rich human languages of expression…. The genesis of the human mind is in this sense not mono-logical, not something each person accomplishes on his or her own, but dialogical” (1992b: 32, my italics).

From the moment we speak about a dialectical process, the process becomes mutually obligatory. Both sides are ethically and epistemologically obligated to certain conditions of communication: normative, epistemological, ethical, and even aesthetic. When we enter into dialogue we join a game, and like any game, it is governed by the universal rule of mutually accepting the rules of the game.

We must also distinguish recognition from customary rights. It is different as it depends upon a need and upon a process. One has the right to freedom of speech regardless of whether there is a need for it, and it can be used regardless of the prior process that “provides” it. However, when it comes to recognition, it seems irrelevant to give recognition if an agent does not feel the need for it, and such a need is not fulfilled arbitrarily. There has to be a process whereby one asks for recognition, explains why one is in need of it, whyone is entitled to it, what kind of distress iscaused by the lack of recognition, what is needed to obtain it, and so on. If we are to place this in the perspective of freedom, it is not a manifestation of Berlin’s negative freedom, nor even his positive freedom; it comes closer to what Axel Honneth defines as social freedom. That is, freedom which grows out of social action: “On this account individual subjects can perform the reflexive acts required for self-determination only if they interact with others who do the same” (42). If Berlin’s distinctions are individually framed, in social freedom people depend upon cooperation with others, which serves not only to defend or fulfill this freedom but also to deepen it. Honneth gives two important examples: public deliberation and love (friendship). Like these, cultural recognition does the same; it increases citizenry capabilities. It falls under social freedom as it is dialectical and reflexive, and as such it becomes normative for both sides. Dialogue is not just a gift given; it is a gift which comes with burdens. What, then, is involved in such a process? It is not my intent to point out all the components of multicultural dialogue, but I will briefly describe several characteristics in order to underline the complexity involved. Afterwards, the question that arises concerns the implications of this complexity for public sphere institutions. In articulating this I will divide my discussion into two categories of burden, epistemic and moral-political (though often these points of view overlap).

1. **The Epistemic Burden** 
   1. **The Requirement of Generality**

Unlike interpersonal dialogue, in multicultural dialogue there is a requirement for generality. Both parties address each other as a generalized other. That is, each side is required to generalize their positions, arguments, dialectical responses, and self-presentation. Only when this is done can one party request responses like showing empathy and expressing agreement or disagreement. This is not to say that discussion is restricted to an abstract level, for particularities cannot be overlooked. Furthermore, multicultural dialogue is not only accomplished between formal political representatives. Groups and individuals can participate in this sort of dialogue in an informal context too, as long as the requirement for generality is respected.

* 1. **Acknowledging Foreignness**

The side demanding recognition asks to be listened to. Why should they be granted this? In the first place, there is the assumption that the addresser and addressee are foreign to each other. There is a cultural gap that needs to be acknowledged. This requires listening in its deepest sense—the one asking for recognition must be allowed to explain, for instance, the importance of a particular cultural practice, its historical context, its symbolism, its prevalence, and the like. Asking to be listened to imposes a duty of empathy on the listener, who is called to listen without being critical or judgmental. Then, the listener (in this case the dominant culture) asks in response to be heard. This listening, however, is of a different kind. For example, it can show the degree to which the dominant culture feels challenged or threatened by a particular cultural practice, the constraints it might impose, and so on. A non-judgmental attitude is called for, on both sides. This does not mean an a priori consensual attitude, or some disposition to adopt such an attitude. The dominant culture is asked to fully acknowledge all of the details laid on the table, including delicate or seemingly “odd” matters, and must endeavor to avoid judgment. Moreover, in dialogue each side should be ready to hear what they do not wish to hear: after all, an interlocutor’s response may cause offense when it is aimed at one’s deep-seated beliefs.

# The fact of foreignness presents us with an epistemological dilemma: on the one hand, the listener needs to interpret the discourse of the addresser, and thus use Davidson’s principle of charity, whereby we use “our beliefs as a guide to the meanings of the speaker’s utterances” (Princeton Enc.). But, when received in this way, the addresser’s request for recognition is negated, for it is made dependent on being translatable into the addressee’s language. On the other hand, how can another culture be shown recognition if, in the end, there is no way of translating it into the target language? Is it enough to believe the addressee is authentic as a sufficient condition for giving recognition? If a culture is not translatable into the language of the listener, would it be better to talk about tolerance instead of recognition?

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# Time and Recognition

How can multicultural dialogue be defined as a process? First of all, it is an exchange that unfolds over time. Time is a serious player in any dialogue, but it plays by its own rules. First, it is flexible. Sometimes dialogue moves forward quickly, sometimes it has to slow down, and at other times dialogue needs to stop to allow one of the parties to think over some issue or reflect on what has been accomplished so far. There are times when an issue may be explained succinctly, whereas other issues are more complex and need to be illustrated in detail. One should keep in mind that we are speaking here not of a dialogue between two persons, but between what is better termed two institutions (even when these are represented by two persons). It is a political dialogue and as such it demands certain responsibilities, capabilities, prior preparations, and adjustments. The factor of time raises questions like: What is the starting point? In what way should each side present their own positions? Who should present each cultural position? What is the right pace for things to progress? What is the procedure for dialogue? How should each party avoid making mistakes in presenting their case? In what way and to what degree should the person speaking present a general outlook rather than their private one? When handling a dialogue, one has to be very organized and careful in presenting things and at times one may be impulsive, exhibiting emotions without holding back in any way that might damage the other’s perception of authenticity. Sometimes an exchange calls for a retreat and a reorganization of thoughts, demands, positions, articulation, and so on. It calls for rhetorical capabilities, political negotiation skills, and the ability to adopt at times the view from nowhere, and sometimes the view from within.

When entering into dialogue, unlike a public speech, or even an argument, each party is committed not to their own “natural” rhythm, but to the rhythm of the other side, and each party serves the other side. While in an argument one might launch a verbal attack, attempt to set a trap, or hide a weak point, in dialogue one expects issues, problems, and opinions to be methodically covered; it is the space of confession, request, explication. Also, institutional dialogue, unlike negotiation, and even unlike interpersonal dialogue, is endless in theory. It defines no ending. Though there may be moments of agreement or crisis when a party might leave the dialogue, it never comes to a complete stop, as dialogue always invites parties to return. Dialogue with the other is first of all dialogue with oneself, because each party is forced to reflect on themselves, show their vulnerabilities, and express their needs, including what kind of compensation is demanded.

One has to expose oneself, as this is not a discussion of rights in the field of liberalism. Having a right to something means one can demand that right without needing to prove or show anything. The only condition for being entitled to this right is being a person or a citizen. When it comes to dialogue, however, the addresser must honor certain moral and epistemological commitments. For example, the addresser must be authentic, without hiding certain aspects of their culture or selectively highlighting others; they need to expose prejudices, arbitrary beliefs, stereotypical thinking, and so on. Self-exposure means removing layers, becoming naked. It requires moral courage and willingness to deal with the results of such self-exposure, not only with regard to our fellow others but also to our cultural peers. Thus, it involves double self-exposure. First, in exposing one’s identity to one’s interlocutor. Second, this exposure is accompanied by a parallel process of rearticulation, which can be constructive or sometimes destructive. To think of one’s culture is to think of one’s history and rephrase it. As Gadamer points out: “To think historically means, in fact, to perform the transposition that the concepts of the past undergo when we try to think in them. To think historically always involves meditating between those ideas and one’s own thinking”. A dialogue implements the hermeneutic circle, since when one party explains themselves to the other, they need to articulate their own self-understanding at the same time, to make it thicker than it was before (to use Clifford Geertz’s terminology). It is through dialogue itself that we not only examine and shape our self-understanding, but also become able to grasp our future horizons: “the horizon of the present is continually in the process of being formed because we are continually having to test all our prejudices [prior understandings]” (Gadamer?????) ; or, as Wiercinski puts it: “primarily it is about the will to learn about oneself while dealing with others” .

* 1. Dialogue and Reasonableness

# Though human dignity includes being culturally recognized, it is still debatable whether each cultural position deserves such recognition. And if the road to recognition passes through dialogue, then what are the epistemological criteria for it? I would like to consider four demarcation lines for this: tolerance, neutrality, rationality, and reasonableness. It may be unfeasible within an article to offer deep explanations of these concepts, but it is enough for now to show their importance, fruitfulness, and necessity. Of these four epistemic possibilities I claim that only reasonableness is suitable, though it is the most complicated and “fuzzy” to implement.

* + 1. Tolerance

Tolerance is a position that enables opinions and practices to coexist in society, even if on the face of it certain opinions strongly oppose dominant and acceptable values. However, this is not a full value pluralism approach; it is at most a de facto pluralism, a passive acceptance, as it is not an outcome of basic empathy or even curiosity. Tolerance maintains an attitude of hostility, suspicion, or even indifference towards the value being tolerated. Therefore, although it enables legal or political inclusion, it does not welcome the other value or culture, nor does it have any sympathy for it; it has nothing to do with caring. Tolerance basically remains hierarchical towards the “other” opinion, and the dignity it appears to accord it is primarily formal, instrumental, and paternalistic. This is reflected in the idiomatic expression, ‘I cannot listen to this guy, he is so unreasonable’. When people appeal to tolerance, their claim is that they see no point in dialogue.

* + 1. Neutrality

Neutrality is a political position where some substantive positions are excluded from the public sphere while still allowed to exist within the private one, as they use justifications that are foreign to liberal discourse. According to Larmor, “Neutrality is not meant to be one of outcome, but rather one of procedure. That is political neutrality consists in a constraint on what factors can be invoked to justify a political decision” (1987: 44). These positions are excluded not because they are wrong or false, but because they rely on substantive reasons and not on procedural reasons (such as fairness, equality, reciprocity, liberty). However, when it comes to cultures, most of the time the private view of the good—and cultures are concepts of the good—cannot be practically excluded to private spheres, but rather applied within public cultural spaces, given that culture in practice is a public entity (Geertz, 1973:10–13). Schools are an excellent example of this, and the challenge in education is whether neutrality serves the educational ethos which is concerned with nurturing curiosity, social involvement, social empathy, and self-examination. There, neutrality becomes an excessive burden (de Marneffe, 2002). Furthermore, as Kymlicka adds, the implementation of brute and simplistic ethical neutrality in educational spaces create de facto an ethical-political vacuum that leaves that space open to political market forces (“majority opinion”) or general cultural hegemony (such as neoliberalism, consumption culture, and the like) to act unfettered, such that in practice there is no neutrality (1995:4–6). Moreover, most people see schools as indispensable tools for transmitting tradition and culture; we want schools to be non-neutral, to allow cultural discourse.

* + 1. Rationality

One view of rationality is that it is not something universal but rather related to the internal point of view of a given culture (Winch, ); it can be understood on the basis of internal criteria, for instance a culture’s core values, moral assumptions, undisputed beliefs, internally developed approaches, and methods of deduction. Rationality is rigid, and only a tacit acceptance of these beliefs can make room for debate. Thus, a religious Jew may rely on biblical or Talmudic quotes when arguing with another religious Jew, but this would be ridiculous when arguing with a secular or Muslim person. Therefore, in cultural dialogue it becomes problematic when each party appeals to rationality.

* + 1. Reasonableness

A good indication of the importance of being reasonable in dialogue is the saying: ‘I cannot listen to this guy, he is so unreasonable’. When two parties enter into dialogue, both are expected to hold reasonable positions. If someone’s opinion is considered unreasonable, this does not mean that it can be dismissed; in dialogue it must be listened to, given attention, and tolerated. Indeed, if one labels another’s opinion as unreasonable, one has to have participated in some prior communication and become acquainted with that otherness. Only then can an opinion be claimed to be unreasonable and only then does refusing dialogue become morally reasonable.

Reasonableness is midway between neutrality and rationality. Rationality expresses a certain mode of monistic thinking which excludes other modes of “alleged” rationality, whereas reasonableness represents a wide spectrum of “rationalities”. John Rawls defines reasonable behavior: “Persons are reasonable in one basic aspect when, among equals, for example, they are ready to propose principles and standards as fair terms of cooperation and to abide by them willingly, given the assurance that others will likewise do so” (2005: 49, my italics). But what does it mean to be ‘ready’ in this way? One way of interpreting the proposition is on a psychological level, meaning a mental willingness to enter into a sort of negotiation with another group and to compromise. But there is another way to look at it, which does not cancel out the previous interpretation: being ‘ready’ is having the epistemological capability to enter into a process of cooperation. This is the capability of correctly reading the other’s positions, crises, needs, and possibilities, of presenting one’s own principles, and so on.

Sen extends Rawls’ proposal for an ‘overlapping consensus’ by pointing out that the idea of political justice means there are various points of view that represent various dominant and internal values, but those who hold those values should justify these choices to the other “cultural” position in a way that suits both sides (2009:12-14). Consider, for example, a mainly liberal-democratic state, where human rights are an integral part of its constitution. The secular citizen (let us assume that secularity represents the majority) views rights theory as an essential element of respect for humanity. The religious person, however, opposes this “metaphysical” view of humanity as the center of universe, while adopting religion as a source of moral behavior. The minor culture becomes reasonable when it is able, through dialogue, to find ways to reinterpret its practices to show that it poses no threat to the major secular culture or even the way it is combined with the liberal theory, for example by redescribing a set of values (e.g., interpreting the holy scripture in such a manner that it puts these secular values under the defense of liberal rights). Thus, it is not essential to reach an agreement; what is needed is to show there is some liberal reason for allowing these practices to exist.

As part of a process of articulating a general position, reasonableness creates responsibility to one’s peers belonging to the same culture, since what is claimed represents not only one’s personal beliefs but also what is believed to be reasonably and generally consensual. Entering into a dialogue forces the one who negotiates to identify a reasonable representation of their cultural position with the agreement of fellow partners of that culture.

Such a complex interpretational maneuver obliges one to enter into a reflexive process, to abandon the automatic or “natural” way of using and understanding culture in its pre-reflective form. It involves a form of research that focuses both on the self and on one’s peers who share the same culture. Compromises have to be made, for instance regarding differences of interpretation about meanings, and common denominators need to be found and agreed upon.

Entering into a dialogue involves an element of risk as this process is not structured, formal, or controlled; it is a dynamic process, where people respond to one another, negotiating around focal points and articulating concepts and assumptions. Dialogue often navigates the participants and not the other way round. As Gadamer notes, when one enters into dialogue one enters into a game, not only in the way it is played, but also in agreeing to play it according to the rules, without breaking them at any point, and with the awareness that losing is a possibility. As the dialogue develops it becomes more and more like a game which forces itself on the players, taking control of them. In multicultural dialogue “losing” is of course much more complex than in a basketball game. It may manifest as a feeling of not getting enough empathy, sympathy, respect, concern, and so on from the other side, and it might also translate as acknowledging and accepting facts, or recognizing what can still realistically be achieved. Also, cultural partners could clash under the pressure of having to define a clear position (whereas in daily life people are able to compromise, skip over, or completely ignore internal clashes).

This means that even before entering into a dialogue with a second party, one is compelled to engage in some kind of internal dialogue with oneself and with one’s community members, and this sometimes even involves negotiating or facing a crisis. It is much like Honneth’s concept of social freedom whereby freedom is extended as a result of social reciprocal actions (Honneth brings in the examples of friendship, intimacy, and family).

This is, of course, more than an epistemological process; it is also a deeply psychological one. In a way, it is acknowledging the otherness that we ourselves embody when we are in a dialogue; members of a given community need to estrange themselves from their self-identity to overcome this. The cultural aspect of one’s beliefs and practices is confronted as something that creates a double-sided identity: there is personal identity and at the same time an internal otherness, which is worn like a mask. One might say that people make culture reasonable; sometimes, however, the outcome of such a dialogue is that it becomes non-reasonable, to themselves!

1. The Moral Burden

# In the former section, this paper showed the epistemological burden of entering into a cultural dialogue. In the following section, I will show the moral and ethical burdens it imposes. I use the term ‘moral’ when referring to actions toward other people and ‘ethical’ when the burden weighs on the subject who seeks recognition in terms of capabilities, personal autonomy, and virtues. It should be emphasized that epistemological and moral evaluations often overlap. Indeed, refining or developing self-reflexive capabilities is epistemological as well as ethical.

1. **The Fact of Dialogue as an Act of Recognition**

One might assume that dialogue is a means of obtaining recognition, but we should take note of the fact that even by just agreeing to enter into a dialogue, before one word is spoken, a step toward recognition has already been taken: just being willing is itself an act of recognition. In entering into the process of dialogue, the addresser is willing to speak and the addressee is willing to listen. Both sides believe, even if momentarily, in the process and thus show a willingness to trust each other. This initiates a political change, and power relations are put to the test in the public sphere. That is, in asking for recognition the weaker side expresses some acknowledgment of the other side’s hierarchical position; by making such a request, it recognizes the legitimate “superiority”, or at least legitimacy of the other side. On the other hand, the addressee admits *prima facie* that such a request is justified, that it needs to be examined.

# Moral Hedging

From a semantic point of view, if culture is taken to be some kind of entity, it is assumed to have an essence that gives it stability. However, this perspective could be seen as misleading, for culture is much more like a kind of living organism. It undergoes constant change as it responds to technology, political circumstances, its historic context (e.g., modernity), other cultures, linguistic changes, literature, media, and so on; it is constantly on the move. Furthermore, the practices of a culture can emerge and disappear, but even if a particular practice keeps reappearing, its meaning may change over time. In addition, the meaning itself can be fuzzy, though understood enough to be socially useful. This useful fuzziness occurs through pragmatic tools like Wittgenstein’s family resemblance, Grice’s cooperative principle, the deduction of implications, presumptions, and so on. Some of its members employ much of its vocabulary, while others use less, and yet both of these groups are able to identify themselves with the same culture and feel a sense of belonging; cultures are not homogeneous or monolithic; they are “internally diversified and unfinished” (Dallmayr, 2011: 59).

# The act of entering into a dialogue involves confronting culture and giving it a linguistic description, somehow stabilizing it, and cancelling out internal differences for the sake of conveying what is essential to the other side. Thus, it places the subject seeking recognition in a position where they are asked to rearticulate and state their cultural capital. That is, when one enters into dialogue, one actually confronts one’s own culture, because one is asked to give an account of it (articulate, explain, interoperate, examine, translate). Dialogue ignites a process of self-reflection and self-exposure. Cultural self-exposure can, on the one hand, maintain or stabilize a culture, but it can also bring about criticism that obligates subjects to make normative intra-cultural changes. In the most extreme cases, such criticism may motivate subjects to abandon their culture altogether. Thus, unlike factual multiculturalism that represents the tolerance point of view, where cultural diversity is imprisoned in the ghettos, engaging in dialogue might cause an opposite movement: destabilization.

# Partial Recognition

When the addressee agrees to enter into the process of dialogue, this implies that they have accepted the request for recognition. But, given this is true, can full recognition actually be achieved? Why the justified need to accept recognition entails a counter obligation to give recognition to each of the sentences in the other's vocabulary? For recognition to be provided it is sufficient that only a significant part of the other’s vocabulary be recognized. Consider the case where a person is said to understand a particular language; does that imply that they are familiar with every word or sentence in the dictionary of that language? Certainly not. There may come a moment when it is normal to say “He knows the language”, but this does not mean that the person fully masters that language (if such a thing is possible). Similarly, recognition of a culture does not require the recognizer to politically agree with every message conveyed in the addressee’s vocabulary. When a culture asks for recognition through dialogue, it is also reasonable to expect that they should be prepared for non-recognition of (or even opposition to) some elements expressed in their vocabulary. Such partial non-recognition does not entail the failure of that dialogue, nor does it exclude overall recognition. Thus, a liberal culture can recognize the legitimacy of a culture that counts sexual modesty as one of its leading values, just as it can give recognition to a culture that values sexual freedom. But it cannot, on the other hand, give recognition to violent acts committed in the name of “family honor”, for this is a moral issue that is opposed by any liberal culture, even if overall recognition is given to that culture.

* 1. Implications

As the discussion above shows, dialogue is a very complex process, one that involves serious epistemological and moral burdens. The implications are personal and institutional. If recognition and cultural dialogue are features of the public sphere, this implies that adjustments sometimes need to be made. I would like to consider this from the institutional point of view, especially in terms of the space needed for dialogue, and from the personal point of view, especially the concept of personal autonomy.

* + 1. Institution

# From an institutional point of view, recognition first of all requires a meeting place. Dialogue intrinsically demands some kind of face-to-face interaction, because without that it is pointless to speak of real recognition. A face-to-face situation urges both sides to be authentic, and it imposes mutual willingness and an obligation to listen; it requires the parties involved to carry mutual responsibility.

# Secondly, places have institutional norms. That is, when entering a certain place, one is expected to accept and abide by its rules. One becomes like a guest and any prior notions of hierarchy are negated. Neither masters nor victims, participants define a new set of intersubjective relations, without subordination. In such a setting, a triangle is created, one that is composed of institution, personal autonomy (to be discussed later), and cultural dialogue.

# Though one can identify some places in the public sphere where vague rule-following practices take place, they may not be institutionalized enough or adequately equipped to offer the sort of formal setting that would be suitable for multicultural discourse. What is needed is a pedagogical environment that legitimately compels the subject to respect certain practices; an environment that enables discussion. An environment that, prior to the question of multiculturalism, has a mandate that addresses epistemological and moral demands, as well institutional facilities and codes of conduct.

# Given the above considerations, it seems that the most suitable options for cultural dialogue are educational spaces (classroom, academy, high school, conference, or seminar). Such an institutional setting manifests Honneth’s slogan of “The I in we”, which reflects the idea that social freedom exists when the “I” is involved in a certain “we”. This “we” is not the plural of “I”, but through this plurality of persons new communicative options are opened up that enhance the development, or even the creation, of capabilities like critical thinking through otherness, reflection on one’s self-identity, and self-bravery (whether this is moral, sociological, or psychological). Educational spaces keep alive a historical ethos centered around such capabilities: respect for critical thinking, the value of learning together, didactic dialogue, rules of mutual respect, confronting truth, and so on. Thus, the “we” is the educational space. It seems there is general difficulty in seeing the public sphere as a community; it is more often perceived as a collection of individuals connected by a liberal ethos involving the recognition of rights, or by a general civic ethos, but certainly not connected by a sense of community. The classroom, however, is an entity with the characteristics of a community. It contains intimate relationships among students, a shared local and physical space, shared practices and goals, constant encounters, and pedagogical rejection of noninvolvement or indifference. These characteristics distinguish the educational sphere from the public one, showing why the former is more suited for multicultural dialogue than the latter. Not only that, when multiculturalism plays out within the public sphere, this happens mostly through political actors and institutions, and people do not receive a fair opportunity to develop their personal multicultural positions. In the public space the dominant discourse centers on rights and thus blocks dialogue, while in the educational sphere we search for dialogue. Walzer correctly noted that we should distinguish between goods and define them in reference to the particular space to which they apply (1983:6). In the public sphere these goods are rights, while in the educational space they are words.

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# Being Autonomous

# In public discussions the term ‘autonomy’ can be used offhandedly, in a way that neglects its complexity, despite being a word that should be used prudently. This often occurs because people tend to take autonomy to be a social fact, a right. There is, of course, a right to autonomy, but it is a mistake to think that because there is a right to something, people automatically have the capability to exercise that right correctly. Autonomy in the deepest sense of the word is about meaningful social capability which is accomplished mostly through Honneth’s concept of social freedom, that is, through negotiating with others, through back and forth movement between individual autonomy and the public response. The right to autonomy is not enough: the concept needs to be lived, as in “being autonomous”. Personal autonomy is about choosing practices because they stand for who you are; it involves developing ethical and epistemological skills, including: self-reflection, self-exposure, critical thinking, openness, readiness to oppose power, moral-psychological capabilities (bravery, reflection, maturity, self-consciousness, honesty, mental endurance), linguistic capabilities (translation, redefining concepts), political maturity (being able to consider the costs of (non-)recognition and the ways in which it can or perhaps should not be implemented), and intersubjective capabilities (imagination, empathy, sympathy, sensitivity).

# What comes out of this discussion is a clearer understanding of the ways in which autonomy and multiculturalism—when acknowledged through dialogue—are socially embedded. Margalit and Halbertal reject the argument of multiculturalism from autonomy in favor of an alternative view of multiculturalism in which people are seen as having a “natural” right to their own culture, no need, or right, to ask the cultural seeking recognition inner acknowledgment and practice of autonomy; a person has a right to culture, even if their own culture does not honor the principle of autonomy (Margalit and Halbertal, 1994: 491–492). Tamir continues this line of thought, and asserts that in rights-based liberalism, where there is no prior demand for exhibiting autonomy, there is a higher chance of cultural pluralism (Tamir, 1999). Tamir, as well as Margalit and Halbertal, overlook the consideration that societies that do not accept the ideal of autonomy do not enable dialogue with other cultures, oppose any possibility of cultural separation, and do not provide tools for individuals to formulate other parallel cultural possibilities. Thus, in practice, the pluralism they assert on behalf of rights-based liberalism may, at best, reasonably describe an existing situation but cannot enable further development. This is a factual pluralism that subscribes to the value of tolerance but does not seek continual improvement through intercultural discourse. I accept, as they assert, that it is impossible to force adults to act out of autonomy. However, even if the autonomous model is too perfectionistic, this does not contradict the individual’s right to opportunities for attaining autonomy. Moreover, it does not rule out a complex notion of dialogue, one that not only allows for factual pluralism but also advances pluralism. Such an advanced pluralism views multiculturalism not just as a social fact to be defended, but as a living social process. The claims of Margalit, Halbertal, Tamir, and others regarding the existence of a right to culture rely on the concept of human dignity, and on the fact that an individual can refuse autonomy as a formative value in their culture. Yet such a refusal can only be accepted when behind it there is a deep understanding of the meaning of this refusal. Such an argument against the centrality of autonomy in the public sphere cannot be accepted in education, because in education the value of dignity demands the opposite: in education there is a specific call for access to this possibility of autonomy in a meaningful way. An adult can, and is allowed, to refuse the value or use of autonomy, only when it has been offered concretely and meaningfully and not just as a floating and hollow possibility. Respect for the refusal to use autonomy is morally legitimate only when the subject has been unequivocally exposed to autonomy, in a direct and practical sense. Only then can a person truly express a second-order desire to refuse it. Being in dialogue, as a justification for multiculturalism, negates any attempt to withdraw to a policy of multicultural ghettos. As Habermas points out, “All actions affecting the rights of other human beings are wrong if their maxim is not compatible with their being made public.” Therefore, multicultural education needs to be approached according to the rules of dialogue. In other words, one must distinguish between the right derived from autonomy and the right to autonomy. One must also distinguish between an existing right to autonomy and a manner of functioning that is autonomous.

Mill, in his classic discussion of freedom of expression, points out that a certain claim holds the value of truth, at least tentatively, only when it survives its conflict with opposing claims. One can say that between two claims, one of which has survived the tests of opposing claims and the other has not, we will give more epistemological respect to the second claim. The same is true in multicultural education. Specifically, a position that acts out of a desire to strengthen a particular culture, and to maintain it as a vibrant culture, must not provide cultural education that is isolating, but must rather provide education that presents various opportunities for confronting that culture. Confronting is not the same as opposing; it is more like holding up a crooked mirror, or looking at an alter ego, for it serves culture as a dialectic mode of operation.

In conclusion, if the reader of this paper asks whether it provides an argument for multicultural education or whether it surveys the concept of dialogue, the answer is both. Taylor unites multiculturalism and dialogue, and in doing so makes it necessary to explore the epistemological and moral burdens embedded in such a process, as well as questions of where to do that (institution) and what capabilities it imposes (autonomy).

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