Education and Multiculturalism: From Personal Autonomy to Institutional Autonomy

# Introduction—Two Justifications of Multiculturalism

1. The two main justifications that have been offered for multiculturalism are the communitarian argument and the argument from autonomy. Both of these points of departure are fundamental to the discourse about multiculturalism in contemporary political thought as well as in a range of social contexts (media, education, cultural public resources, academia, political representation).
2. Ostensibly, if both points of departure lead to similar conclusions, one should be able to employ both arguments in a discussion of the question of multiculturalism in education and use them in similar ways. In this article, I will argue that although the two arguments reach similar conclusions, investigation of the foundations of the communitarian argument and the argument from autonomy reveals a different educational approach to multiculturalism from that which we might have intuitively concluded if we took only the bottom line of these arguments into account. That is, although one might suppose that multiculturalism suggests an educational approach wherein each culture withdraws into itself, I argue in this paper that the opposite is the case. In other words, even if the different justifications arrive at similar conclusions at the surface level of a thin description, we ought to remain committed to the original assumptions of each approach, which lead in practice to a significantly different thick description of multiculturalism.
3. This article, then, will review the communitarian argument and the argument from autonomy, and afterward critically assess the implications of the presumptions of these arguments, which I refer to as the “blind spots”, and the way these “blind spots” affect the question of multiculturalism in the educational sphere.
4. In the section addressing “blind spots” the article will develop two points:
5. The communitarian position is based mainly on the view of recognition as a demand made by persons living within marginalized communities and partly identifying themselves through those communities. The article will show the degree to which this demand entails various capabilities and practices that require a complex and dynamic view of recognition that cannot merely be satisfied by a demand for recognition by the subject, based on its being a right, but also require the subject to develop significant autonomous skills before he or she can make a legitimate demand of recognition. These skills cannot be exercised within the public sphere.
6. Following this, I will show that there are blind spots also in the justification from autonomy. Like the communitarian argument, the justification from autonomy implies that there are prerequisite capabilities and practices necessary for autonomy to function in support of a well-lived life (in the Aristotelian sense), and like in the communitarian argument, these capabilities and practices cannot be exercised in the context of the public sphere.
7. Finally, I will argue that only in education can these blind spots be appropriately addressed. This is because the educational space is autonomous in the sense that it has autonomous logic, has its own aims, its own sense of subject, and is based on its own practices.

# The Communitarian Justification

1. John Rawls’s canonical book A Theory of Justice (1971) followed Kant’s political theory in presenting the figure of the impartial subject as a liberal political ideal. This subject is capable of placing himself behind a “veil of ignorance” regarding his own position in a particular social system yet retains full knowledge and understanding of all of that society’s layers (sociological, economic, cultural, religious, political, and legal). Based on this knowledge, Rawls argues, the subject can use general and universal rational considerations, including those of game theory to generate a theory of justice that benefits all sides, including his own side, in a manner that is fair and mutual.[[1]](#footnote-1)
2. Rawls’s approach sets up a conception of the subject that was strongly critiqued by communitarians, who regarded it as an unreasonable and unfair portrayal of human existence. This conception, they argued, is amorphic, non-particularistic, and in fact drags Rawls’s discussion towards a metaphysical discussion, a discussion Rawls himself attempts to avoid. For example, McIntyre, in his alternative and opposing description of the human subject, writes as follows:

[w]e all approach our own circumstances as bearers of a particular social identity. I am someone's son or daughter, someone else’s cousin or uncle; *I am* a citizen of this or that city, a member of this or that guild or profession; *I belong* to this clan, that tribe, this nation. Hence what is good for me has to be the good for one who inhabits these roles. As such, *I inherit from the past* of my family, my city, my tribe, my nation, a variety of *debts, inheritances, rightful expectations and obligations*. These *constitute* the *given*of my life, my moral standing point. This pan is what gives my life its own moral particularity (1984: 220. Italics are mine).[[2]](#footnote-2)

In this quotation, McIntyre describes belonging to a community in a manner that appears deterministic to the point of fatalism, as can be seen in his use of the following terminology: “I am,” “belong,” “I inherit,” “expectations and obligations,” “debts,” and “constitute the given.” In McIntyre’s description, people are historical creatures against their will, they “carry” a particular narrative history on their backs, and they interpret and evaluate situations based on this history. They are unable and unwilling to ignore it because it is their identity. Taylor continues this line of discussion in pointing out that a significant amount of the horizons from which we act, plan, and adapt future actions are connected to existing communal commitments, identifications, oppositions, values, norms, and expectations, as can be seen in this quotation:

My *identity is defined* by the *commitments and identifications* which provide the frame or horizon within which I can try to determine from case to case what is good, or valuable, or what ought to be done, or what I endorse or oppose. )1989:27. Italics are mine).[[3]](#footnote-3)

1. It is important to note that despite the communitarian despite the tendency to devalue autonomy, this is not a position that denies the day-to-day phenomenology of people making choices. Rather, it asserts that a fairer and more realistic position would accept the fact that even if we act out of a particular past, these choices express elements of “freedom to” rather than “freedom from.” And to use Berlin’s later terminology, we act primarily out of positive freedom rather than negative freedom (1997: 191–242). Similarly, Geertz, in his discussion of the question of culture, proposes understanding it as closely connected to a view of positive freedom: “man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself spun, I take culture to be these webs” (1973:311).

If we continue the metaphor of a web, the size of the web’s holes, and its changing and dynamic scale, are what define the measuring stick of “freedom to” (positive freedom) that a particular culture presents. So, the tighter the web of a particular culture in terms of values, norms, rules, expectations, and the like, the degree of “freedom to” that it allows the individual is limited, and the reverse is true as well—the looser the web of the culture, the broader the “freedom to” it allows the individual. In fact, we can note that Geertz acknowledges the power of culture in describing the individual as “held” by a web, yet also observe how the imagery of being held by a web implies that that culture provides the individual existential security. These positions recognize the special value of community and culture for the individual, and thus the unfairness and naivete of the Kantian-Rawlsian demand that the individual engage in thought and action elevated up to “a view from nowhere.”

1. Therefore, the communitarian approach proposes cultural identity as a social fact that has at its center the community, its values, and its vocabulary. This insular position appears to undergo a transformation in Taylor’s discussion, which points out that the communitarian position does not end with presenting a subject with an identity who looks only inwards, to his community, but rather that his identity necessarily also looks outwards. In his article “The Politics of Recognition” (1992), Taylor proposes a double extrapolation of Hegel’s classic master-slave model. According to this model, individuals formulate their sense of self through dialectical relations of recognition with the other, and consequently, recognition is an existential need (Hegel 1953: 399–410; see also Kelly 1993). The first extrapolation is in that without recognition, which occurs through dialogue with the other, the sense of self, and thus the dignity of the individual, is significantly harmed, because “Non-recognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being” (1992: 25).

In making this extrapolation, Taylor assumes that each individual has such a right to make a demand, and the other has an obligation to respond to this demand, to *assist him* in formulating his cultural selfhood. This is an approach that places a substantive obligation on the subject, the community, or the state towards the other. Is there in fact such an obligation? It appears important to distinguish here between non-recognition and misrecognition. Taylor does not appear to make a meaningful distinction between the absence of recognition—the repair of which would entail a too strong obligation—and misrecognition, which refers to a situation in which there was a prior social-political process of recognition that harmed the other, and therefore we have an obligation to fix it in a process of renewed recognition. I will also discuss this later.

1. The second, more radical extrapolation that Taylor makes is in transforming the concept of recognition into a political concept rather than only a moral one. In the personal dimension, the process of recognition remains moral and interpersonal (recognition between a mother and child, or a teacher and student), but people are subjects whose individual identities include a significant cultural component, and this component also requires recognition. Such recognition can primarily be provided by political entities and public institutions because only they have the power to provide it. It also cannot only be on the level of consciousness and communication but also obligates enabling the capabilities to maintain culture and ensure its flourishing (through infrastructure, budgets, and legal protections). In making this extrapolation Taylor brings the discussion from the moral to the political sphere, to the concept of rights:

This presumption would help explain why the demands of multiculturalism build on the already established principles of the politics of equal respect. If withholding the presumption is tantamount to a denial of equality, and if important consequences flow for people’s identity from the absence of recognition, then a case can be made for *insisting on the universalization of the presumption of a logical extension of the politics of dignity. Just as all have equal civil rights, and equal voting rights, regardless of race or culture, so all should enjoy the presumption that their traditional culture has value* (1992:68. Italics mine).

Given that recognition is based on otherness, and regarding cultural recognition, the meaningful other is not an individual but rather an oppositional dominant culture, and when referring to the capabilities to maintain culture and ensure its flourishing, this other is the state (which acts as other in reference to every particularistic intra-state culture); it is the other in the form of law, institutions, and the public sphere.

1. It is important to distinguish here between the concepts of recognition and tolerance. Taylor’s position extends beyond the value of tolerance accepted in liberal thought because tolerance is a passive position that enables opinions and practices to exist in society in the face of opposing positions that expose dominant values, but it does not entail legitimation, empathy, or recognition of a position’s importance for the other. It is not a full pluralist approach, but rather at most a de facto pluralism; it is an approach that seeks to avoid using force in the public sphere, one that is aware of the power of uncertainty, and therefore enables a multitude of opinions, based on uncertainty, or a concern for public stability and quiet. Tolerance by nature enables other values to exist alongside a particular approach, but at its basis maintains an attitude of hostility or suspicion towards the value being tolerated, and therefore although it enables inclusion, it does not necessarily enable the other value or culture the legitimacy to flourish and thrive; it does not grant dignity to the other culture. Tolerance remains, at its basis, hierarchical towards the “other” opinion, and the dignity it appears to accord is primarily instrumental and paternalistic (Cohen A. J., 2014; McKinon, 2006: 3–34).
2. In this sense, tolerance is close to the ethically neutral approach in liberalism, according to which a particular all-encompassing view of the good is permitted to be applied in the private sphere, whereas in the public sphere only certain dimensions of that view of the good are permitted to be applied—those that are not excessively overbearing and can be abided in various ways—again, through tolerance. Yet the view that a view of the good can be coherently limited to the private sphere is an illusion because the private view of the good must often be applied within public cultural spaces, given that culture is in its essence expressed in public (Geertz, 1973:10–13). It does not exist only in the mind or personal space of the individual, nor only in narrow close circles like family, but requires interpersonal practices that take place in public spaces. Schools are an excellent example of the challenge in demarcating a neutral public space, primarily regarding the question of how much neutrality acts as an excessive burden and how appropriate it is that they be neutral (de Marneffe, 2002). Furthermore, Kymlicka adds, the implementation of ethical neutrality in public spaces (and other inclusive spaces, such as the educational) creates a de facto ethical-political vacuum that leaves 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 (1995b:4–6).
3. As can be seen, the position of the communitarians places community as a primary dimension of existence, prior to liberal individualism. Their position seems to be a natural starting point for thinking about multiculturalism and seems to be the only position that can justify multicultural policy. For these reasons, their position challenged liberal individualistic thought. Will Kymlicka responds to this challenge by offering a liberal-Rawlsian interpretation that places the individual at its center yet still successfully integrates multiculturalism as a liberal position. Does his position narrow or broaden Taylor’s discussion? I intend to assert that it broadens his discussion, and yet still creates a lacuna within it that the public sphere cannot deal with.

# Multiculturalism and the Argument from Autonomy

1. Will Kymlicka is without a doubt the central liberal thinker on the question of multiculturalism. In several books and articles, he successfully moves in his discussions between the philosophical-theoretical and the concrete-circumstantial planes (Kymlicka, 1995a; Kymlicka, 1995b; Kymlicka, 1989). Kymlicka proposes important distinctions regarding the question of culture and community while offering a theoretical alternative to communitarian discourse, yet still requires multiculturalism as the central position in liberalism. In contrast to the communitarian position that abandons the assumptions at the basis of Rawls’s approach, Kymlicka continues those assumptions and even proposes expanding them.
2. Kymlicka’s starting point is the distinction Rawls proposes regarding primary goods as being at the basis of the good life (as before, in the Aristotelian sense of a well-lived life). Beyond the primary goods that Rawls identifies (freedom of thought and conscience, political freedoms, freedom of assembly, the right to body and property), Kymlicka identifies an additional good that is necessary for the good life, that of action through a particular cultural approach (Kymlicka, 1989: 166). In contrast to the goods that Rawls identifies, which are close to the liberal concept of rights and thus close to the concept of negative freedom, culture is important specifically because of the similarity it bears to the concept of positive freedom.[[4]](#footnote-4) Although the rights provided to us protect us from a forceful outside power and enable (negative) freedom, they are lacking a substantive context from which people interpret their choices; they are primarily procedural. Culture completes these rights, and in this way, Kymlicka’s position is similar to that of the communitarians: it provides a context for the choices we make, in terms of the possibilities we face, the value entailed in different matters, and the ability to renew and improve our culture (Kymlicka, 1995b: 76; 1989: 166).
3. Culture, in this sense, complements the liberal ideal of autonomy. When the concept of personal autonomy is analyzed, one can note that it refers primarily to procedural characteristics (planning, discretion, critical thinking, thought pertaining to various time scales, the ability to separate from cultural-social pressures, and reflection) (Dworkin, 1988). Yet every procedure requires a reference point for the materials from which it functions. In terms of its functionality, it is indeed independent of specific materials, but its intentional structure requires them.
4. Moreover, Kymlicka, as a liberal, accepts the assumption that we require a cultural world from which we give thick meanings (Geertz, 1973: 5–10) to our actions, yet on the other hand he does not accept the limiting assumption that the individual is unable to transcend the culture into which he was born through reflective judgment and innovate his own cultural position, inside or outside that culture—to withdraw from the culture he was born into, or to adopt his own cultural position. According to Kymlicka, people are two-layered beings—they go about their everyday lives based on the worldview within which they are submerged, but can also reflexively arise above that worldview (and as such embody the liberal persona), and are therefore able to break free of it if needed (Kymlicka, 1995a: 81–82; Nagel 1991).[[5]](#footnote-5) Like the communitarians, he adopts the view that people judge, evaluate, examine, plan, and even define themselves through a cultural worldview. Yet, and here is the significant difference, in contrast to the communitarians, he subjugates culture to the value of liberal autonomy rather than to that of community existence (Kymlicka, 1995a*:* 81-82); he sees culture as an epistemological value, whereas the communitarians identify it as a sociological fact, and as a result, his position maintains individualism and freedom as primary foundations. In Kymlicka’s view, people require a cultural context—epistemologically, morally, and politically—but can choose culture like any other choice.
5. Of course, Kymlicka’s argument is threatened by the possibility of circularity. If choice requires a cultural-epistemological context, a context from which people choose culture x rather than culture y is unclear. Yet this is a logical problem more than it is a concrete problem, because even Kymlicka recognizes that people are born into a particular culture and have a meaningful relationship towards it, one of belonging and caring that binds them to it as a leading interpretive option (Kymlicka,1989: 164‑165). He asserts that despite this intimate relationship, the implementable liberal ideal of autonomy enables them to rise above these constraints.
6. Kymlicka’s position does not emphasize that culture is in a person’s interest because of a preexisting identity whose abandonment would come at too high a cost. Rather, culture is a meaningful good that expresses continual self-creation, choice, reflection, and development and serves the Aristotelian view of the good life. This generous interpretation of the concept of culture receives extreme expression in the work of Waldron, who proposes a thick liberal approach of cultural “juggling.” Waldron points out that many people move among various cultural resources (e.g., living in San Francisco, loving Chinese food, wearing Korean clothes, listening to Verdi arias, and participating in Buddhist meditations), and in practice design for themselves a cultural environment that is autonomous-individualistic and cosmopolitan (Waldron, 1995). Following Waldron, rather than speaking about culture in its classical and monolithic sense, we currently speak about culture as a contemporary puzzle created through personal choice towards the construction of one’s life in a particular way.
7. In Israel, for example, when we speak generally about cultural frameworks, we refer to relatively concrete—and generally ethnocentric—structures such as Mizrahi culture, Ashkenazi culture, and Arab culture. According to this more flexible and fluid approach, people autonomously design their own cultural systems. There will be some who choose to design a cultural framework that provides central expression to their connections to their geographical surroundings, such as an emotional connection to the earth, sustainability, and the like, while there will be others who seek a cultural framework that defines itself as a liberal culture and which is guided by canonical liberal texts, emphasis on liberal history, appropriate social involvement on questions of distributive justice, marking central events in liberal history (Martin Luther King Jr. Day, Universal Human Rights Day). Others will “identify” as Mizrahi but simultaneously “identify” as vegan. In other words, it is also possible to use Kymlicka’s claim to introduce new cultures and belongings, and to belong to more than one culture. Those who are interested in such cultures are not obligated to prove belonging to a preexisting way of being that has a history, an ethos, a textual corpus, preexisting customs and ceremonies, but rather they can demand the right to define this environment in a dialogical, developing, and responsive manner.
8. One can see that Kymlicka’s approach maintains certain ideas that connect it to the communitarian approach (being born into a culture, the emotional connection to a culture, the meaning of culture to future life, the ontological status a culture has over individuality), while at the same time there are salient differences between it and the communitarian approach that draw attention to the possible dynamism in transition between groups: the instrumental-epistemological, rather than ethical importance of culture (in terms of identity); the view of culture as a resource but not necessarily as deterministic; and first and foremost, the view of culture as an autonomous-individual choice.
9. But is communitarianism indeed so foreign to the ideal of autonomy? Does the liberal public sphere in fact appropriately represent the ideal of autonomy as pertains to culture? In the next section, I will show that in the two approaches there are what I call “blind spots” regarding these questions.

# “Blind Spots” in the Communitarian Approach and the Approach from Autonomy

1. The communitarian approach presents community and culture, which, it holds, are prior to individuality. It points out how individuals identify themselves first through community and only afterward as individuals. In the current discussion, I intend to show that the communitarian approach is characterized by many aspects of personal autonomy. By personal autonomy, I mean a thick interpretation of the concept, without which, I believe, the concept loses its power and meaning as an expression of formal choice based on freedom. In my view, these are aspects that express dynamism, critical thinking, reflection, and moral bravery.
2. The importance of culture as a value is often tied to its being an expression of personal identity, yet is it not the case that identity becomes a component that primarily represents force and impinges on freedom? One can make such an argument because culture is that which we were born into, what we see as social “nature,” by which we acted from a young age (generally without reflection), which enables us at the stages in which we lack existential security to act in the world in relative safety. Culture represents our parents’ past, the framework in which we and our friends act, and through it, we concretize our interpersonal relations. It is a position that attends to the collective memory perpetuated both in the contemporary cultural moment and in personal memory (a memorial is a good example of present collective memory), and, thus, personal identity; it is our existential environment, through which we understand ourselves. As such, culture creates for us not only an environment but also a normal sense of obligation: that of loyalty. It would appear that the use of the term loyalty moves us away from any possibility of autonomous action, yet does loyalty express such a complete denial of autonomy, or of the abilities at the basis of autonomous action? A deep examination of this issue exposes the degree to which loyalty is actually close to the position of freedom, and the autonomy to be loyal means to understand that my identification with a particular person, community, or value can be partial or complete conflict with my personal interests and yet adopt the action that is in conflict with my interest and demanded of me, despite my ability to avoid such action. Only then loyalty receives meaning as a concept. In other words, to be loyal means to be in meaningful reflection and consideration, and to act out of freedom. The reference is not to complete and blind compliance but rather to a continual choice to be loyal. Loyalty is not obedience.   
   In this manner, consent through loyalty is not a violation of human freedom. And, to use Frankfurt’s terms, it is a clear expression of what he calls “second-order-volition” (1971); it is the volition that says, “I am interested in remaining loyal to community-based on the desire to remain in the community,” that this belonging entails an interest that is greater than the countervailing immediate interest. Someone loyal feels that the countervailing action is a sort of betrayal of the self, of memory, of people close to him who represent the same loyalty-demanding object (family, loved ones, friends). On the other hand, one can assert that the existence of such freedom cannot deny the cognitive dimension entailed in that loyalty object, nor can it deny the power of that object to act on the subject: to demand a commitment that is not substantively and particularly dependent on the object but rather dependent on the fact of our being under the cultural category of a loyalty-demanding object (tradition, religion, spouse, child, state). Again, this is not to deny the possibility of freedom, but rather the opposite; it is to assert that only in the presence of freedom this commitment can be called loyalty rather than obedience. Loyalty can also express gratitude to a continuous past from which identity arises, gratitude that expresses a consciously chosen position. In such a case it is gratitude, rather than faith in the truth of the act expected of me itself, that motivates loyal action; in such a case, abandoning loyalty is justified only in the case of a strong counterargument.  
   Thus, if we take a well-known loyalty object such as a religious tradition, people who adhere to traditional practices do not necessarily see traditional ceremonies such as prayer, as expressions of faith in God or faith in the transcendence in existence. It is sufficient for them that it be a meaningful ceremony that enables them to define themselves, to provide themselves historical, cultural, and biographical belonging, to maintain memory. Even if the rope of loyalty is overly taut, abandoning the loyalty object requires a critical argument for the necessity of abandoning it. What arises from this short discussion of loyalty to community, a loyalty that is certainly a communitarian value, is that it cannot take place without characteristics of autonomous thought.
3. Let us now return to the question of recognition and consider what it means to recognize culture. Although Taylor, following Hegel’s classic master-slave model and other writers such as Honneth (1995), presents a convincing account of the importance of recognition, here I seek to move the discussion slightly away from the concept of recognition—which semantically refers primarily to consequences—towards the process that is its foundation, especially towards the concept of dialogue that Taylor places at its center. According to Taylor,

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, emphasis added).

In other words, recognition and the formulation of a sense of self are not a dichotomous matter for a “yes” or “no” decision (on the part of the recognizer or the recognized subject) but is rather the cumulative result of a dialogue from which the sense of self and recognition come forth. It is a dynamic process that is bipolar and interdependent. From here several questions arise:

1. First, even if we agree that we have an obligation to provide recognition—since without it there is a violation of the other’s ability to establish his sense of self and thus a violation of his human dignity—this does not mean that provision of recognition is necessarily provision of positive recognition. Clearly, if I view someone else as morally flawed and spend time with him, this does not mean that in a dialogic meaningful relationship I must violate my personal integrity and honesty and grant him positive recognition. In other words, although this may sound strange at first, the fact that we have a negative view of the other does not deny our obligation, or right, to express or communicate this view, specifically based on our commitment to him as a person, since, according to Taylor, our commitment to recognition does not stem from a particular piece of content that we are interested in transmitting or must transmit, but rather from the right of the individual to a self, and therefore if our view of him is negative, we must express this view to him as part of our commitment to human dignity.[[6]](#footnote-6) As Taylor himself explains regarding Dworkin’s well-known distinction, liberalism is primarily procedural rather than substantive, and the obligation to human dignity is primarily procedural, which leaves the substantive dimension open to considerations of truth, tact, and authenticity but it certainly cannot obligate lying (Taylor, 1992: 56).
2. Secondly, Taylor speaks about recognition not only as non-recognition but also as misrecognition. It is unclear the degree to which non-recognition actually imposes an opposing obligation on the other to enter dialogue; it is unclear whether the fact that I feel I require something places on the other the obligation to provide it to me, certainly when we are speaking about a public space in which relations between individuals are by definition not communal but at most reflect fairness and cooperation. On the other hand, misrecognition is different. To say that misrecognition has occurred means that unfair harm has resulted from a previous recognition process and thus it imposes an obligation on the sides to introduce a reparative dialogue or a protest. Such a dialogue obligates the two sides to consider their basic positions (e.g., mutual preconceived notions), and to agree on means of communication and clarification.
3. Third, the question arises as to why the need to recognize a particular culture entails the obligation to recognize each of the sentences in that culture’s vocabulary. Even if there is a right to recognition, for sufficient recognition to be provided it is sufficient that a significant part of its vocabulary, or its significant sentences, be recognized. When we say of a certain person that he understands a particular language, does that imply that he is familiar with every word in the dictionary, in any grammatical formulation? Certainly not. Similarly, recognition of a culture does not require recognition of or agreement with every sentence in that culture. General recognition can be provided even without recognition of many sentences of that culture. When a subject asks for recognition of his culture, it is also reasonable to assume that he is willing to accept non-recognition of some of the sentences that make up his culture in the context of the dialogue we are speaking about. The argument from recognition *imposes an obligation of a certain degree of recognition, rather than specific recognition of all a culture’s components.* Thus, a liberal culture can recognize the legitimacy of a culture that places sexual modesty as one of its leading values, just as it can recognize a culture that places sexual freedom as one of its values. But it cannot, on the other hand, recognize acts of violence done in the name of a “family honor” in the more conservative culture. This is a moral sentence the culture seeking recognition must either remove from its discourse or have it remain a point of disagreement between the two cultures. This situation does not impinge on the possibility of recognition and, therefore, the right to recognition.
4. This, of course, raises the question of the criterion that distinguishes between which values can be recognized and which cannot. It appears that in this case the criterion that Rawls sets, of reasonableness, can apply to this part of the discussion. Given the constraints of this article, I will not go into an in-depth discussion of the meaning of this criterion, but I rather will make do with Rawls’s definition:

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, emphasis added).

But what does it mean to be ready? One way of interpreting it is on the psychological level, meaning psychological willingness to enter into a sort of negotiation with another group. But there is another way, to look at it as the epistemological willingness of beings with an advanced capability of offering conditions of cooperation. This is the capability of correctly reading the other’s positions, crises, needs, and possibilities. Of course, the two possibilities do not negate each other and may even complement each other. This is in contrast with a rationality that is derived internally in relation to a certain view of a given culture, a view that has values, moral assumptions, approaches from which things are deduced and judged as rational, and thus it is not appropriate as a criterion. In other words, in the public sphere, groups cannot justify their positions and attempt to convince others with arguments that are internal to their own positions. Sen continues this line of thought in pointing out that the idea of justice means that there are various points of view that represent various dominant values (internal to various theories) but all of those who hold those values can justify their choices in a relatively convincing manner, not only for themselves but also for the “opposite” position according to its parameters (2009:12‑14). A secular person, for example, will view rights theory as expressing an essential element of humanity, while an ultra-orthodox Jew will present it through a different description, based on consequentialist ethics, at the very least as a means of protecting minorities. Both will be able to use rights as agreed moral facts in discourse with each other. In other words, the agreement on shared “values” is an agreement on the rules of the game of discussion, interaction, and decision; it is rhetorical from the point of view of the general public and does not necessarily reflect moral, political, and metaphysical depth. Like in a game, what determines our ability to play together is our agreement to play by the same rules, not necessarily to use the same justifications for those rules.

1. What does the concept of dialogue impose on us as a bilateral process? From the moment we speak about a dialectical process, the process becomes mutually conditional. The side that demands recognition is ethically and epistemologically obligated to certain conditions of communication—normative, epistemological, ethical, and even aesthetic. Recognition is not a natural right completely independent of the other, like, e.g., the right to one’s body. Nor is it a natural right that overrides any condition, if it is indeed a right, is a sort of product dependent on a process. The recognizing side is also obligated to such conditions of communication. 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 describe several characteristics in short to concretize the complexity involved and the autonomous skills required.
2. First, the side demanding recognition asks to be listened to. This is listening in its thick sense—he asks to be enabled to explain the depth of a particular practice in culture, its historical context, its symbolism, the degree it is widespread, and the like. The side providing recognition also asks to be listened to. For example, he can show the degree to which a particular practice challenges it as a countervailing culture, the degree to which it is foreign to that side, and the like. Moreover, unlike natural rights, this is not a process in which from the moment we recognize the right of a group to culture, the obligation to dialogue, and its instrumental importance, cease. In other words, multiculturalism requires including within it continual and significant dialogical elements between cultures, certainly between the minor culture (e.g., a minority ethnic group) and the major culture (e.g., nationalism as a culture).
3. Second, a dialogical encounter is first an encounter of self-exposure. Self-exposure is a position that imposes on the exposed certain obligations. It must, for example, be authentic, it cannot hide certain sides of itself, and it must bring itself as a whole and not only the sides of itself that are convenient. Additionally, it is self-exposure to oneself before it is exposure to the other; prior to exposing oneself, one is obligated to look at everything being exposed, to search for hidden areas that one would prefer to hide. Self-exposure means to remove many layers we wear, which serve us to broadcast ourselves to the public sphere and to instead be naked. It requires bravery and willingness to deal with the results of self-exposure to our environment and to us. This is a visibility that is difficult to avoid addressing. At the moment one exposes himself, questions arise, answers are required, and understanding, empathy, the ability to explain and justify, and other obligations arise. Of course, such exposure also places an opposite obligation on the exposed listener: to be empathetic, to respond with a concomitant exposure, to be careful about being judgmental, to accept feelings, and the like.
4. Moreover, the fact that there is a constant dialogical need is liable to place the subject seeking recognition in a position that, for him to attain such recognition, he is forced to express his values differently, and may even want to reinterpret his values, express flexibility about them, and even abandon certain sentences in his vocabulary. Schools that are not segregated by culture, and which expose students to critical and open discourse, in practice take a cultural risk on behalf of the groups to which their students belong. Cultural self-exposure can, on the one hand, maintain a culture and even enable an understanding of its depth and a capability to identify with it through deep convincing, but it can also entail critique that obligates normative intra-cultural changes and even, in the most extreme case, motivate abandoning culture.
5. To be in dialogue also expresses loyalty. One who is in cultural dialogue is one who has a starting point from which he enters the dialogue. As Burth points out, following Callan’s discussion (1997), to act autonomously is not necessarily to choose, out of a distant and uninvolved view, from a preferred direction from a number of possibilities, but rather to act out of an existing situation (Burth, 2003: 183–193), out of one’s being, out of the encumbered self that one is (Sandle, 1984). Individuals are indeed born into tradition, memory, and culture, and do not act in a vacuum, or from Kantian subjectivity. Rawls’s proposition can serve as a starting point for drawing political guidelines, but it cannot describe the concrete human existence in which we act out of a particular cultural identity. This impossibility does not mean that autonomous action is impossible but rather that it must come out of an existing situation and only from there can it bear the possibility of enacting change, convincing, and even abandonment. To choose out of naive preference expresses lesser autonomous capability than to choose out of critical identification, crisis, existential questions, and self-questioning. Initial loyalty is the starting point for choice even if, in the end, abandonment may result. The choice of a person lacking prior preferences to be secular is different from that of a religious person to abandon a particular religious system “because he can no longer bear it” and to choose secularism in its place. The two choices, to abandon and to start anew, have a very different existential meaning from the choice to simply prefer secularism to religiosity.
6. From all the above, a picture arises that reflects significant autonomous capabilities: self-reflection, critical thinking, openness, honesty, the capability to deal with competing positions, and epistemological capabilities that accompany ethical capabilities. It should be said that this argument does not assert Taylor became a liberal individualist but rather that his position is more modest while still sufficient for the continuation of the discussion: recognition involves significant autonomous capabilities.
7. It would appear that I have led Taylor’s position towards Kymlicka’s position in pointing out the autonomous components involved in Taylor’s view, and in so doing have concluded the discussion. Yet now I intend to show that even in Kymlicka’s starting point there are certain “blind spots” that should be revealed and considered, blind spots which also lead to the educational field.
8. First, as mentioned, the individualistic–liberal starting point’s dependence on the concept of autonomy might intimate, if only intuitively, a narrowing of the possibilities of multicultural diversity. In fact, this position expands these possibilities. As mentioned, the communitarian position starts from the assumption that people are born into a culture that simultaneously establishes and enables the horizons of their thought, even if not completely. It is a world with its own ontology. Its reference point is the past that already exists, and this past defines the possibilities of multicultural dispersion. Kymlicka’s discussion, on the other hand, proposes culture as having instrumental value, and it follows that the liberal personality is not specifically bound to one particular version of the many views of the good (including a religious view), the sources of which are in a historical or ethnic past, but rather expresses the unique human capability to inhabit a type of dynamism of improving self and culture, including even the creation of new cultural possibilities, the legitimacy of which is the fact of their being desired and their fitting external conditions of being culture (practices, norms, rules, ceremonies, ethos, sufficient demography, accompanying ceremonies, and the like).
9. Alongside this, in contrast to the communitarian position, which maintains a monistic, tight relationship between culture, identity, and community, Kymlicka’s position is primarily epistemological-functional. For him, culture is a context that is *situationally* required and from which we act and interpret. And as Strike mentions, communitarianism fits a temperament of tribal-cultural closedness, rather than that of urban modernity, in which we depend not only on one central culture but rather on a cultural diversity from which we constitute ourselves, and thus we also cannot always identify ourselves culturally in a singular way (2003:82–87). It is worth making a significant distinction between multiculturalism based on identity, which we shall call embedded multiculturalism, and the liberal concept of multiculturalism, which requires a less tight and monistic relationship, one that expresses affiliative multiculturalism (Feinberg and McDonough, (2003): 3–8).
10. It can also be seen that compared to Taylor’s position—which identifies recognition as the basis of multiculturalism—Kymlicka’s position better expresses a liberal temperament. Taylor presents recognition as the individual’s **need** that is placed in the lap of the other/society. Yet, if indeed recognition is a need cast upon the other, it is not clear why such a need imposes on the other (the state) a countervailing obligation to recognize it (a right). For example, we will all certainly praise a person who out of compassion acts on behalf of the other whose life circumstances harmed him, but alongside this compassion, we will be hard-pressed to assert that he is obligated to act in this way. Taylor’s position leaves the state in the position of a compassionate actor—in practice, his position grants power to the state and creates dependence on the state. In contrast, Kymlicka depends on the concept of the individual’s autonomy, a concept that is intuitively “natural” for liberal thought. This is an approach that, although it recognizes the individual’s need to act out of a particular cultural context, it at the same time does not see why such a context requires recognizing the other. It is an approach of rights and perfectionism. Here, recognition does not stem from dialogue but rather it expresses a right; it does not demand an exceedingly complex theory of dialectic, of dependence on the other and his goodwill.
11. Some, like Margalit and Halbertal (1994), assert that such an approach implies that the individual has a right to culture, but not necessarily to his own culture. According to them, this serves as an “alibi” for the state to abandon its commitment to a specific culture and to make do with enabling the subject access and assimilation into a particular “shelf” culture, or even into a culture the state has an interest in, to the point of erasing his original identity. Therefore, they sharpen Kymlicka’s view of rights to include the individual’s right to his own culture. As we saw in the above discussion, such a position does not accord with a thick and authentic view of autonomy but rather narrows it to an uninformed, if independent choice. In this sense, it continues the claim made by Margalit and Halbertal. Moreover, Margalit and Halbertal themselves remain within the discourse of rights, lacking perfectionistic characteristics. It is important at this point of the discussion to identify the relationship between the type of sphere and the sphere’s logic (Walzer, 1983). When we act in the public sphere, the primary logic that is used is the discourse of rights. In the context of such a discourse, the other/community/state has an obligation towards the individual. When there is such a right, the individual need not provide a special justification in making a demand. He need not provide personal information, motivations, explanations, and the like in order to demand that this right be provided; the mere fact of a right is sufficient. In this way, it is a discourse that has a non-perfectionistic tendency, and a tendency to alienation. Raz, in his discussion of the question of multiculturalism, points at the way modernity and urbanism are landmarks in individuals’ tendency to seek for themselves anonymity in the public sphere (1994: 171–172). In this manner, the weaponry of rights is a convenient means of conducting a discourse that does not require deep discussion and familiarization. It is a sphere that makes it difficult to conduct a discourse of caring or a discourse that involves debate. Of course, this need not necessarily be the case, and indeed there may be those who alongside the discourse of rights see the need to make room for a discourse that includes compassion, caring, empathy, mutual recognition, particularism, dialogicity, and the like (Glendon, 1991; Sagi, 2006:135–142). Yet still, even if such an approach should be adopted, it is impossible to ignore the “character” of the public sphere, and, moreover, the lack, in practice, of appropriate practices in such a sphere for conducting such a discourse.
12. Sen and Nussbaum offer a more complex approach which they call the capabilities approach, in contrast to shallow approaches based on dignity. Capabilities are early building blocks in human development that provide future meaning to people to function as citizens: “The capability of a person reflects the alternative combinations of functionings the person can achieve, and from which he or she can choose one collection” (Sen, 1993:31).

In fact, according to Sen, capabilities are prior to actual life, which he calls functioning:

Functionality represents parts of the state of a person – in particular the various *thin*gs that he or she manages to do or be in leading a life. The capability of a person reflects the alternative combinations of functioning the person can achieve, and from he or she can choose one collection (Sen, 1993: 31).

In other words, the two are dependent on each other. It is impossible to imagine sufficient functionality without appropriate capabilities, and without appropriate functionality (the possibility of implementation in various spheres), capability is meaningless.

1. Sen’s position was primarily formulated in regard to the value of equality, and it presents primitive and non-perfectionistic equality, yet this distinction can also serve us in the discussion of multiculturalism and as an expansion of a perfectionist concept like autonomy. Multiculturalism in the public sphere pertains to the stage of functioning, a stage that comes after that of capabilities. This is the stage of the concrete encounter, the situation at hand, and the functioning of the concept, a stage that cannot offer capabilities. The sphere that can offer the development of such capabilities cannot exist in the public.
2. At this point, it is important to consider the meaning of one of the well-known arguments regarding the limits of recognizing cultural legitimacy. Both communitarians and liberals submit that every individual has an exit option from the culture in which he acts. Lacking such a right, it is difficult to see legitimacy in the recognition of culture, as such a lack critically impinges on the right to freedom. In practice, lacking an exit option, it is impossible to have a multicultural policy that recognizes cultures. I intend to use this agreement to understand what is at its basis and then, what it lacks, and to show how this lack can lead us to the educational field and to the “capabilities approach” in that field.
3. The formal option for an adult to exit the culture in which and from which he grew up is often presented naively in liberalism. The assertion that there is such an option is formally and legally correct, but sociologically and psychologically it avoids the emotional-cultural complexity involved in such a step. To leave a culture means not only to refuse something but also to cease living in self-delusion, to think critically, to be willing to separate from a significant part of one’s personal identity, and to separate—in many cases—from people who are close (family, friends), from familiar ways of living, from existential safety, from a sense of home. It is an assumption that carries, on its flipside, a meaningful autonomous subject. When liberalism assumes an exit option it also makes a strong assumption that adults in the public sphere have this capability, and if they lack this capability then it is their responsibility; the liberal postulate, according to which we act in the public sphere, is that people in this sphere have such autonomy. It is a discussion that assumes the individual not only has a right but also a functional capability. Multicultural ethics cannot make do with a formal approach to the right to a multicultural approach. Unlike other rights that are prerogatives (such as the right to movement), the right to be a part of a particular culture, to oppose that culture from within, and to abandon a culture from within, requires submitting capabilities rather than only formal possibilities.
4. On the other hand, any attempt to educate the individual to autonomy in the public sphere is problematic because it requires pedagogical, paternalistic, educational, and formative capabilities that generally have no place in the public sphere. The solution to this complication is moving the weight of the discussion to the educational field.

# Multiculturalism, Autonomy, and Education

1. Margalit and Halbertal in practice reject the argument of multiculturalism from autonomy in favor of a view of multiculturalism as a “natural” right to one’s own culture. A person has a right to culture, including to determine, even arbitrarily, on behalf of his own culture, even if his own culture does not honor the principle of autonomy (Margalit and Halbertal, 1994: 491–492). Tamir continues this line and asserts that in rights-based liberalism there is a higher chance of cultural pluralism (Tamir, 1999). Tamir ignores that societies that do not accept the ideal of autonomy will not enable dialogue with other cultures, will oppose any possibility of cultural separation from their midst, and will not enable tools for individuals to formulate other parallel cultural possibilities. Thus, in practice, the pluralism she asserts on behalf of rights-based liberalism will, at most, reasonably express an existing situation but not enable further development from its midst. This is a pluralism that connects itself at most to the value of tolerance and thus does not involve continual improvement as a result of intercultural discourse. In addition, the tolerance she discusses generally comes from liberals who identify with tolerance as a consequence of the ideal of freedom, but not from non-liberal societies for which tolerance is at most a *modus vivendi* rather than an embodiment of the liberal virtue.
2. In both cases, it appears that the sides do not distinguish between the argument from autonomy and the argument for the right to autonomy. Even if, as they assert, it is impossible to force adults to act out of autonomy, even if the autonomous model is too perfectionistic, and even if we can observe pluralism specifically in societies that are not autonomous or perfectionistic, this still does not contradict the individual’s right to receive capabilities for autonomy. Regarding an adult, we face difficulty explaining how at this stage of his life we can form and demand for him autonomous capabilities. However, regarding a child, there is a built-in interest in forming in him the conditions of autonomy, and the special circumstances of education place such an obligation on us. The claims of Margalit, Halbertal, Tamir, and others regarding the existence of a right to culture that does not obligate action from autonomy depend on the concept of human dignity and the fact that an individual can refuse autonomy as a formative value in his culture, yet such a refusal can only be accepted with understanding and from recognition of human dignity as a prior value when the refusal is one of a concrete value, one behind which is a deep understanding of the meaning of the refusal. Such an argument cannot be accepted in education, because in education the question is of a child, whose human dignity specifically requires him to be exposed to this possibility in a meaningful way and only then to decide. An adult individual can and is permitted to refuse the value of autonomy only when it has been offered to him concretely rather than only theoretically. In other words, one must distinguish between a right from autonomy to the right to autonomy. An individual who refuses, in the public sphere, to live his life according to the liberal ideal of autonomy, which Sen refers to as functioning, still does so by the force of his right to autonomy. One must distinguish between a moment of determination that is autonomous and a manner of functioning that is not autonomous.
3. This would appear to be an argument for developing capabilities for autonomy rather than an argument regarding multicultural education. Yet specifically the awareness and understanding that people are cultural creatures—and on this point, no one disagrees with the communitarians’ contribution to the discussion—requires integrating the topic of culture among these capabilities. Culture and multiculturalism cannot be avoided in this development of autonomous capability, and they must be a meaningful part of it; without reference to the cultural dimension, the meaningful epistemological functions cannot receive expression and develop.
4. 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 provide more epistemological respect to the second claim. The same is true in multicultural education. Specifically, a position that acts from a desire to strengthen a particular culture, and to maintain it as a vibrant culture, cannot provide cultural education that is isolating but must rather provide education that presents various possibilities that oppose that culture. If in the discussion of personal autonomy we emphasized that beyond the dimension of the independence of choice, the dimensions that provide depth to the concept of autonomy are characteristics like reflection, imagination, the ability to stand in the face of environmental pressures, and skepticism, here too that which expresses institutional autonomy for an institution that educates towards a particular culture is not specifically the degree of formal freedom the institution has in the face of external pressures. What makes it autonomous is its ability to formulate a deep pedagogy that expresses the characteristics mentioned above. Multicultural education in which the educational space is lacking cultural identity and offers its participants a “neutral” choice from among a possible repertoire is also unreasonable. The space is in any event affected by external cultural influences; actually, the autonomous interest demands that the choice be made from a preexisting identity and from dialogue, which can ensure authenticity in the choice, and express autonomous courage (Burth, 2003:190).
5. We must add to this claim the fact that we face difficulty seeing the public sphere as a community, but rather, at the very most we can see it as a collection of individuals connected at most by a liberal ethos of rights, or, alternatively, a general civic-national ethos, but certainly not a sense of community. The classroom, however, is an entity with characteristics of a community. It contains intimate relationships among students, a shared physical space, shared practices, constant encounter, the lack of the possibility of flight to areas of anonymity in the space, and shared goals. One can say that alongside personal autonomy, the classroom is an instance of institutional autonomy. Generally, when we refer to the concept of autonomy, we refer to it in connection with its first part (“auto”), which pertains to the place of self-freedom, but the concept has a second part (“nomos”), which refers to the logic that shapes the space in question and makes it unique. The *nomos* of the educational institution enables, requires, and justifies a perfectionism of autonomy. Although a public space seeks justice, it is difficult to describe an educational classroom/school space as seeking a particular form of distributive justice. The view of the good life (again, in the Aristotelian sense) in education is not based on traditional-liberal goods like the rights Rawls proposes. The internal educational discourse will have difficulty accepting the rights discourse as its primary discourse; the central good that serves as an ideal is personal autonomy in its broader sense (without currently, in the narrow limits of this article, defining what it is exactly or what it includes, whether it seeks epistemological excellence, psychological welfare, or capability in the spirit of Sen and Nussbaum). Walzer correctly notes that we should distinguish among goods and define them in reference to the particular space they apply to (1983:6). Multicultural education, if it seeks to continue the perfectionist line taken in this article, must be in the spirit of the elements noted up to here: open, creating encounters among cultures, critical thinking, dialectical, exposing, and exposed. Multicultural liberal education cannot be a defensive or isolating encounter, but must also come from an internal position, from a certain cultural autonomy.
6. Moreover, a culture that demands political multiculturalism as an ideal in the public sphere, is obligated, given the limitations of the public sphere in multicultural dialogue, to a dynamic and open multicultural model. If the public sphere is closer to ideals of negative freedom, neutrality, and tolerance, and has difficulty accepting perfectionistic-autonomous practices (empathy, dialogicity, exposure, critical thinking) as regulative ideals for the sphere, in contrast, the educational sphere is from the outset defined as such. In practice, if the student has a right *to* autonomy, in contrast with the citizen, who acts out of the right **from** autonomy, the consequence of this is that it also creates the right to institutional autonomy.

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1. The claims of universal rationality and impartiality may create a false impression of thinking that is naturally altruistic or that does not see personal interest as legitimate, but Rawls shows that personal interest can also be expressed in an impartial view. This is expressed primarily under the principle of maximin in game theory that is a foundation of the logic that guides him in this discussion. See Rawls, 1974. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Emphasis is mine and intended to draw attention to this factual dimension. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Emphasis is mine and intended to draw attention to this deterministic dimension. See also Sandel, 1982*:* 15–23. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. For a discussion of negative liberty as opposed to positive liberty see Berlin’s classic argument (Berlin, 1997). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. It is hard not to see the similarity to Kahneman’s two systems of thinking. “System 1 operates automatically and quickly, with little or no effort and no sense of voluntary control,” while “System 2 allocates attention to the effortful mental activities that demand it, including complex computations. The operations of System 2 are often associated with the subjective experience of agency, choice, and concentration” (Kahneman, 2011: 21). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Of course, transmitting it is under moral constraints like lack of cruelty, lack of humiliation, tact etc. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)