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Ethical Issues for the Twenty-First Century

Predicting the concerns of a new century is a risky business that may reveal more about the forecasters than it does about what they forecast. Philosophers have always been more at home with issues less tied to the particulars of a historical place and era — issues that, for want of a better term, have been called “timeless.” The word is unfortunate both because of its air of mystery and pretension, and, more seriously, because it suggests that philosophers need not concern themselves with the “real world” nor the real world with philosophy. Nevertheless, some philosophical questions — those concerning distributive justice, human rights, and the value of nature and cultural diversity — arise for every age and every society.

Yet there is also a great deal of contingency, and fortuity, in the form these issues take in a given time and place. As the twenty-first century approaches, policymakers and the public face an array of ethical issues shaped by the technological and political developments of the last half of the twentieth century. Dramatic advances in the technologies for manipulating the natural world in general and human life in particular have radically expanded the scope of what we *can* do, thereby raising serious questions about what we *should* do. The growth of an international human rights movement and the liberalization of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union reflect an emerging consensus about certain basic requirements for a just political order. At the same time, the increasing recognition of the claims and contributions of racial and ethnic minorities force us to examine how cultural diversity can be accommodated within such a political order.

In this special issue of the *Report*, four scholars at the Institute for Philosophy and Public Policy discuss the impact of these trends on some of the ethical issues we confront as we enter the twenty-first century. This issue has been produced with support from the Maryland Humanities Council, which is sponsoring a conference on “Challenges and Choices for the 21st Century” in December, 1991.

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Biotechnology and the Idea of Human Nature

Modern medical biotechnology has captured the public imagination like few scientific developments since the splitting of the atom. Little wonder, for the issues it raises are vivid, dramatic and directly relevant to our lives and well-being. Here we have a powerful, new, some might even say revolutionary technology for detecting and treating disease. What ethical constraints, if any, should we place on its development and application? What impact will this technology have on our values, our institutions, and our general view of ourselves and the world?

There has been considerable public debate about the risks, costs, and benefits of recent developments in biotechnology. These issues, important as they are, are raised by any new technology. Perhaps the most interesting issues about biotechnology, however, are those peculiar to it, concerning the very idea of manipulating life and accelerating evolution. While these issues are less familiar and harder to articulate, they arguably lie behind much of the public concern and apprehensiveness regarding biotechnology, and often form the "subtext" for the public debate.

The Evolving Debate

When recombinant DNA techniques were first developed as tools for laboratory research, there was a great deal of concern about their safety and environmental risk. Critics described in lurid detail a "gruesome parade of horrors" that the new technologies might unleash — epidemics, ecological disasters, and "killer tomatoes." Some of the scenarios were plausible, but none of the disasters was unique to biotechnology: the roster is much the same for the discharge of industrial wastes or toxic chemicals, the introduction of exotic species into new environments, and the more mundane run of medical research. Nor does there appear to be anything novel in evaluating biotechnological risks; as several commentators argue, biotechnology requires no special techniques for assessing overall risk.

While some critics were demanding a temporary moratorium, others were raising broader concerns about intervention in the natural order. The phrase "playing God" was often invoked, and frequent allusions were made to Dr. Frankenstein and *Brave New World*. These critics saw biotechnology as not only risky but presumptuous: they warned of the terrible price we would pay for our hubris in defying the "wisdom of evolution." Defenders of biotechnology conceded that narrow concerns about risk were reasonable, if exaggerated, and could be addressed

by research and regulation. But they insisted that broader concerns about intervention were either a rearguard action against modern science and medicine, safely dismissed, or an expression of religious beliefs not widely shared in our society.

As biotechnology advanced and the worst fears of its critics failed to materialize, the tenor of the public debate changed somewhat. Ironically, as advances in biotechnology brought us closer to the ability to modify and create life, talk of playing God became less prominent. This may have been because such talk was associated with apocalyptic fears that proved unfounded, but it may also be that with greater exposure to biotechnology the public's concerns became more focused and specific.

In medical biotechnology, a standard agenda of issues has emerged during the past few years, debated in government-funded conferences and workshops, reviewed in scientific, legal, and policy journals, and reported in the popular media. This agenda focuses on the risks and social impact of biotechnology, especially issues of discrimination, privacy, and confidentiality in the use of genetic testing, screening and therapy. While concerns about the special difficulties of altering life and accelerating evolution have not been altogether ignored, they have received comparatively less attention in the last several years. I will suggest, however, that they are never far from the surface: they are raised, explicitly or implicitly, in any setting where the proper use of biotechnology depends on a baseline of "normal human functioning."

Not Just Doctors' Dilemmas

The most widely discussed applications of biotechnology are in medicine and health care, particularly in the area of genetic testing and screening. Biotechnology already enables us to detect many genetic disorders before their onset: not only asymptomatic stages of disease but also genetic susceptibility to disease. Who should authorize the tests for such disorders? Who should have access to their results? What choices (concerning, e.g., employment or insurance) should be influenced by this information? While some commentators note the potential for abuse in genetic testing — discrimination, breaches of confidentiality, and the like — there is no generally accepted view about what constitutes abuse.

Suppose an employer knows on the basis of a genetic test that one job candidate is more likely to suffer a debilitating disease than another, and so is a

poorer investment from the employer's standpoint. Is the employer guilty of unfair discrimination if she bases her hiring decision in part on such information? Are insurers unfairly discriminating if they supplement their actuarial tables with the results of genetic tests? In some respects, the employer and insurer would be conducting business as usual. But in other ways, they would be discriminating against the disabled.

How do we decide if genetically predisposed but asymptomatic individuals are handicapped, and so protected from discrimination? In determining what counts as a handicap, we appear to rely on a vague notion of normal human functioning as a baseline. But genetic testing raises questions about the meaning and coherence of that baseline, by revealing the extent to which all of us carry *potentially* lethal or debilitating genes. Are we ever healthy, or are we just asymptomatic?

Underlying this question are doubts about the very meaning of genetic susceptibility. Being genetically susceptible to a disease does not mean that one will contract that disease or even that one has a high probability of contracting it. Some philosophers argue that a claim of genetic susceptibility is really a subjunctive, or "counterfactual", conditional: if you were exposed to such-and-such environments (or maintained such-and-such a lifestyle), you would contract (within a range of probabilities) such-and-such diseases. However, the details of such a conditional are not at all clear. For example, most people who have the gene for the sickle cell trait on only one chromosome do not suffer from sickle cell anemia and have a certain immunity to malaria. But we wouldn't say that those who lack the sickle cell gene have a genetic susceptibility to malaria.

As in defining handicaps, we appear to rely on a notion of normal human functioning as a baseline for susceptibility — here, on normal human resistance to disease. Again, biotechnology raises doubts about the standard of normality invoked to regulate its use: if we can dramatically increase human resistance to disease, what level of resistance is "normal"? This question leads us to the most dramatic medical application of biotechnology: gene therapy.

Many diseases result from defects in specific genes. By repairing the defects or replacing the genes, doctors can treat such diseases at their source. This therapy can be performed on *somatic cells* or *germ cells*. In the former, only the appropriate cells of the affected individual are treated (e.g., bone marrow cells are treated for disorders in blood cells); in the latter, the reproductive cells are treated, thus preventing the defective gene from being transmitted to that individual's offspring. Somatic cell therapy is already being performed, provoking much interest but little opposition. The medical community had begun to assimilate it to more conventional forms of intervention, treating it as a kind of in-vivo drug delivery or micro-surgery.

While germ cell therapy is less advanced, it is far

more controversial. Because it alters the genetic code of the patient and his offspring, it is harder to regard it as a genetic version of conventional therapy. Germ cell therapy raises the specter of eugenics, albeit in a new way.

As traditionally understood, eugenics was an effort to improve the human race by applying the wisdom of animal breeders. The twist introduced by germ cell therapy is nicely described by Thomas Schelling: whereas the old eugenics consisted in selecting parents, the new eugenics consists in selecting children. Indeed, biotechnology seems to hold out the possibility that we will be able to design our children. Who is to decide these matters, and are there any moral constraints on these decisions?

The coercion and intrusion required by the old eugenics made its program morally objectionable. But no such coercion need be part of the new eugenics. Indeed, given the enormous authority we think parents should have in raising their children, why should we scruple over genetic manipulation? Eugenics, then, needs to be reexamined.

The philosophical discussion, however, has not yet risen to the challenge. Most writers rely on the traditional distinction between positive and negative eugenics, between therapy to produce enhancements and therapy to correct defects. The consensus is that only the latter is appropriate medical therapy. This distinction, though, will not stand up to close scrutiny: not only is the line between enhancements and corrections vague — when does correcting dwarfism become enhancing height? — but the concepts of health and disease on which the distinction rests are themselves threatened by biotechnology. Because "normal human functioning" is a vague and mutable standard, it is unclear how to define the abnormal or pathological state for which intervention is appropriate. We can no longer be comfortable with our conventional understandings of health and disease, any more than with our conventional understandings of handicap and susceptibility.

Underlying Concerns

When worries about manipulating life have been raised explicitly, they have taken the form of objections to "playing God." But the objection is at best obscure. In its religious formulation, the concern is that biotechnology gives us a God-like power whose exercise, if not an attempt to challenge God, is an attempt to interfere with His or Her plan. It is tempting to see secular objections to manipulating life as little more than Darwinian theology, with "God" replaced by "the wisdom of evolution." Much like God, Evolution works in mysterious, complex ways. We interfere with Its intricate workings at our peril; the price of our presumption may be the destruction of the human race, or the planet.

But this objection must make the controversial assumption that everything in nature is a result of adaptation, a careful balance of the myriad of ecological pressures and opportunities. Only if nature is

really in such delicate and precarious balance would our interference threaten monumental disaster. The reality of Darwinism is more reassuring. Evolution is chaotic, wasteful, and redundant; we do not confront a seamless web that our slightest blunder may rend. Moreover, neither the religious nor secular version of the objection can say what is so special — so specially fearsome — about biotechnology. Nearly every human activity from agriculture to sanitation can be seen as interfering with nature and evolution.

Nevertheless, it would be a mistake simply to dismiss such objections, which should be seen as poor articulations of important concerns. What are these concerns? I suggest that the worry about playing God is less a fear of apocalyptic failure than an anxiety about the implications of success. While there is no master plan in Nature or Evolution that our interventions may thwart, there are also no clear norms to guide our interventions. We may eventually be able to bring about radical changes in the physical and psychological capacities of human beings. What norms will guide us in deciding on these changes?

Until recently, our inability to make more than slight, incremental changes in human functioning spared us many difficult questions about how human beings should function. Our options were limited by such "basic facts" about humans as their vulnerability to a range of environmental toxins, their wide variation in natural talent and intelligence, and their three-score-and-ten year life-span. Biotechnology is fast removing these constraints, forcing us to consider the limits of genetic intervention: in conferring immunity to environmental toxins, in achieving "true" equality of opportunity, and in slowing or arresting the aging process.

Consider the environmental applications of biotechnology. Ordinarily, we understand by a polluted environment an environment that, as a result of our activities, is injurious to the health of the inhabitants. But this understanding of pollution turns on assumptions that cannot easily be sustained in the face of the possibilities of biotechnology. Instead of reducing the industrial discharge of dioxins and PCBs, why not modify humans so that they thrive on, or are indifferent to, these discharges? The decision about whether to alter the environment or its inhabitants would then be a purely economic one, a matter of efficiency. Of course, one might object that permitting unrestricted discharges would result in an aesthetically unpleasant environment, but that is not obvious — industrial sunsets may be more beautiful than pre-industrial ones — and it does not get to the heart of what we find objectionable.

Consider next the problem of distributive justice. We want to know how the various social goods (such as power and wealth) ought to be distributed in the face of obvious inequalities in the distribution of natural goods (intelligence, vigor, beauty and the like). Until recently, we have tried to move toward fuller equality of opportunity by redistributing social goods, e.g., by progressive taxation and remedial education.

Yet natural inequalities have stood as powerful obstacles to these efforts. While we could attempt to compensate for gross disparities in natural endowment, we could not directly or alter or control the "natural lottery".

How will our understanding of distributive justice change as we learn to control the distribution of natural goods? More than twenty years ago, Bernard Williams noted that a radical solution to inequality would present itself if "an individual's characteristics could be *pre-arranged* by interference with his genetic material," a possibility on whose "dizzying consequences" he declined to speculate. We may soon have to confront those consequences. As we acquire control over the natural goods of genetic endowment, do they become social goods, subject to the principles of distributive justice? Or should the distinction between natural and social goods be maintained, despite the advances of biotechnology? If so, how should that distinction be made?

Finally, consider the problem of aging. As Daniel Callahan has observed, we have long regarded seventy to eighty years as the natural life span, even when few people survived to adulthood. Most of the dramatic breakthroughs in modern health care and medicine, such as the development of antibiotics, allowed an increasing proportion of the world's people to reach their "allotted span of years" but did not push the chronological frontier much beyond what it had been in ancient times.

MEDICAL BOOK ILLUSTRATION

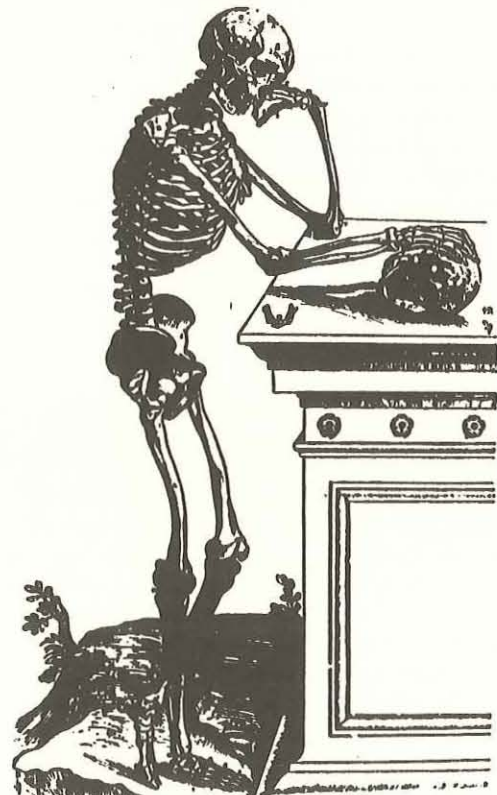


Plate 19. A skeleton from Andrea Vesalius: *De fabrica*, 1543.

More recently, modern hospital technology has indefinitely extended biological life through "extraordinary life-support." We have come to recognize that mere biological survival is not an unmixed blessing. Biotechnology confronts us with a far more radical specter: the indefinite prolongation of conscious, active life through the control of the aging process. If we can stop or slow the genetic program for cell senescence while controlling cell growth, we may be able to increase the human life-span dramatically. But if there are no longer natural limits, how many years should we allot ourselves? How much is enough? Do ever longer life-spans require a profound adjustment in our social institutions? Within a decade, these may well be pressing policy issues.

Biotechnology raises challenging new issues for public policy. In freeing us from the constraints of "normal human functioning," it may undermine the

assumptions that underlie much of the current policy debates. We will have to confront issues that were once left to philosophers and science fiction writers, and make decisions that were once thought to be God's alone.

—Robert Wachbroit

Among the sources discussed or cited in this article are J. Fiksel and V. Covello, "The Suitability and Applicability of Risk Assessment Methods for Environmental Applications of Biotechnology," in J. Fiksel and V. Covello, *Biotechnology Risk Assessment*, Pergamon (1986); Daniel Callahan, *Setting Limits: Medical Goals in An Aging Society*, Simon & Schuster, 1987; Bernard Williams, "The Idea of Equality" in Laslett and Runciman, *Philosophy, Politics and Society*, (Second Series) Blackwell, 1962; R. Wachbroit, "Making the Grade: Testing for Human Genetic Disorders," *Hofstra Law Review* 16 (Spring 1988): 583-99.

Nature Versus the Environment

Literature, history, and the arts take up the idea of nature as often as the ideas of humanity or love; indeed, a culture or an intellectual period can be identified by the symbolism it attaches to natural objects. No society has developed a culture that does not discover symbols in nature and attach special significance to them. But are these expressions of reverence for nature merely curious cultural artifacts, or do they have relevance for the contemporary debate on the environment?

Nature as Beauty and Power

"The two most obvious characteristics of Nature," the philosopher Alfred North Whitehead once said, "are loveliness and power." These were the principal characteristics artists and writers of the American Romantic tradition, including the transcendentalists, found in Nature — which they always spelled with a capital "N." Emerson, for example, discovered in the beautiful and the sublime aspects of Nature moral and religious lessons. "Man is fallen; nature is erect, and serves as a differential thermometer, detecting the presence or absence of the divine sentiment in man."

The transcendentalists inherited from the Puritan tradition the vision of Nature as a collection of images and shadows of divine things ("faint clues and indirections," Walt Whitman wrote) — although the buoyant Emerson thought these symbols were a lot easier to read than did the Puritan theologian Jonathan Edwards a century earlier. Similarly, the landscape of the American West impressed preservationists like

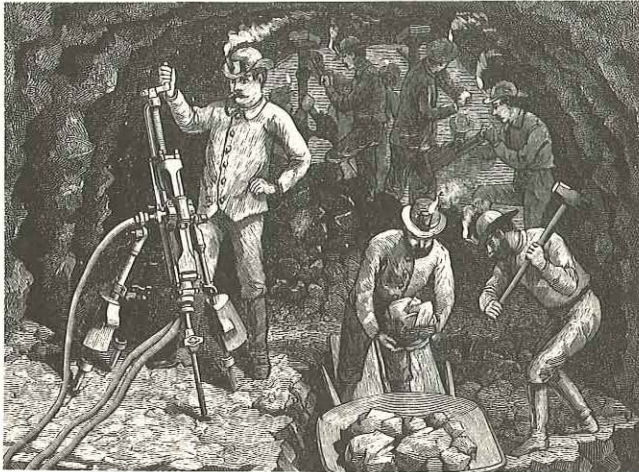
John Muir as a heritage direct from God's hand — a temple in which we should set foot only to worship.

What is striking today about the Romantic imagination of the nineteenth century is the insistence with which it portrayed Nature in moral, religious, and aesthetic terms — in terms of its beauty and power — and avoided mentioning its utility. The literature and art of the period — the paintings of Thomas Cole are an example — suggest that to use Nature is to transgress it, to put something foreign and artificial, i.e., Civilization, in its place. In one passage in which Emerson acknowledges the utility of Nature, he does so apologetically: we "draw our living as parasites from her roots and grains" he wrote, while we receive "the sublime moral of autumn and of noon."

The more Americans exploited the environment — the more they thrust civilization upon it — the more their literature and art celebrated the beauty and power of the Nature they destroyed. The historian Perry Miller observes:

The astonishing fact about this gigantic material thrust of the early nineteenth century is how few Americans would any longer venture, aside from their boasts, to explain, let alone to justify, the expansion of civilization in any language that could remotely be called that of utility. The more rapidly, the more voraciously the primordial forests were felled, the more desperately poets and painters — and also preachers — strove to identify the personality of this republic with the virtues of pristine and untarnished, or "romantic" Nature.

When the Western frontier closed after the Civil War, many Americans recognized the contradiction between the cultural attitude and the practical policy of their nation toward the natural environment. How could we continue to celebrate the loveliness and power of Nature while everywhere we mined it, plowed it, dredged it, and turned it to the purposes of our industrial economy?



Preservation or Conservation?

Preservationists at the end of the last century sought to minimize the encroachment of humanity on nature; like Whitehead, they believed the important characteristics of Nature are aesthetic and moral, not economic. They opposed conservationists, like Gifford Pinchot, who valued nature primarily for its useful resources and who believed that "the first duty of the human race is to control the earth it lives upon." Many of the concepts, metaphors, and associated norms and attitudes familiar in environmental controversies derive from a century-long debate between those who would protect nature for its symbolic qualities and those who would manage resources efficiently for human use.

The preservationist ethic drew strong support from American literature and art, which has approached nature as Olmsted perceived Yosemite, as the object of moral and aesthetic attention "aroused in the mind occupied without purpose, without a continuation of the common process of relating the present action, thought, or perception to some future end." F. Scott Fitzgerald said of one of his characters in *The Great Gatsby* that the beauty of nature compelled him "into an aesthetic contemplation he neither understood nor desired, face to face for the last time in history with something commensurate with his capacity to wonder."

The romantic and transcendentalist writers of the early nineteenth century, and Muir, Olmsted, and the preservationists who followed them, form a tradition with the nature writers of our own day — authors like John McPhee, Annie Dillard, Edward Abbey, Bill McKibben, and many others — who recite a litany for a vanishing natural heritage. These writers tend to

regard nature and humanity as utterly separate.

The idea that nature is what we cannot control — an independent force working on its own — is precisely the reverse of what conservationists like Pinchot believed. Conservationists held that nature or, more precisely, natural resources belong to humanity, which has a duty to maximize its own welfare, and it can do this best by controlling the earth. "The object of our forest policy," Pinchot announced in 1903 to the Society of American Foresters, "is not to preserve the forests because they are beautiful . . . or because they are refuges for the wild creatures of the wilderness . . . but . . . the making of prosperous homes."

Many economists, policy analysts, and others who, in the tradition of the conservation movement, urge us to use natural resources efficiently describe the object of our concern not as "Nature" but as "the environment," by which they mean the physical and biotic resource base for human sustenance and survival.

Writers concerned with ethical, cultural, and aesthetic issues, by contrast, tend to refer to "nature" rather than to the "environment." The titles of major texts in the field of environmental ethics, like John Passmore's *Responsibility for Nature* and Paul Taylor's *Respect for Nature*, avoid the term "environment." Thus, it seems that concepts that arise in the humanities — "responsibility," "stewardship," and "respect" — concern nature, while concepts in the social, natural, and policy sciences — "efficiency," "energy flows," "costs," and "benefits" — apply to the environment. The environment is what nature becomes when we see it as the object of planning, technology, and management.

While the arts and humanities have taught us to love and appreciate Nature for its beauty and power, the economic, policy, and natural sciences have instructed us to manage the environment to satisfy our wants and needs. We may ask, then, how we are to choose between the idea of Nature found in literature, religion, and art, of the one hand, and the concept of the environment we find in the sciences on the other. How can we deal intelligently with a nature that contains both — that is the locus both of beauty and power and, at the same time, of useful materials and resources?

Putting Nature Back Into the Environment

A century ago, Americans celebrated the beauty and power of pristine Nature while they rapidly developed natural resources. They protected a few magnificent landscapes and converted everything else to economic purposes. To experience Nature, Americans escaped to the Maine woods and to the Sierras; they returned to industrial cities like Chicago to develop the environment.

Today, all this has changed. The idea of an inviolate, self-sustaining pristine Nature has proven a will-of-the-wisp, as has the idea of a closed economic system. In place of the separate concepts of Nature and

environment, we now look for a single concept of nature (with a lower case "n") to describe a sustainable habitat — one in which to live harmoniously with our surroundings over the long run.

It has become apparent that neither the preservationist ethic nor the conservationist "gospel of efficiency" is adequate as we approach the twenty-first century. First, consider preservationism. While preservationists have fought for a century to keep the Adirondacks "forever wild," they have been pursuing a chimera. The flora and fauna of that region are hardly aboriginal; they got there in large part because of human activity, which had utterly revised virtually every ecological community in northeastern America. The area surrounding Walden Pond had been transformed by human beings even before the time of Thoreau. Wherever we look, we have played an immensely important role, intentional or not, in the course of natural history. Few if any pristine landscapes exist to be preserved.

It is in general too late, then, to preserve nature as we preserve art; too many changes have already taken place. Besides, to preserve nature as we do art — for example, to make forests into living museums — turns nature into art. To "restore" ecological communities to one of many possible earlier states may be a wonderful thing to do, but it involves human intervention, for we must use science and technology both to identify those states and to achieve them.

It is we who decide, moreover, what is "natural," for example, with respect to forest-fire policy in national parks and in managing populations of wild animals in the absence of extinct predators. Preservationists today, therefore, no longer think in terms of maintaining a hermetic separation between nature and humanity. Rather, they look for ways human beings may play a stabilizing, harmonizing role in or as part of the natural world.

Accordingly, many who stand in the tradition of Muir are concerned to guide and inform the human role we play in nature — not to keep apart from it. New sciences like conservation biology try to understand this appropriate human role — to understand how we may manage our economy to sustain the complexity and stability of nature and how we may manage the complexity and stability of nature to sustain our economy.

Even if we must modify the preservationism of Muir and Olmsted to make it relevant to our present circumstances, however, we need not embrace the "gospel of efficiency" associated with instrumentalists like Pinchot. Too many of us have lost faith in the ability of science and technology continually to subdue, control, and manipulate nature to facilitate economic expansion. As many of our writers, artists, and religious leaders suggest, we may succeed better by accommodating our interests and desires to the limits nature sets than by trying to push at those limits to accommodate our insatiable desires.

Many economists, like Herman Daly, have argued, therefore, that modern economic theory has failed to

address environmental problems realistically because it conceives of the economy as a closed system, in which abstract exchange value circulates in a loop between production and consumption, in splendid isolation from the larger ecological systems of which it is a part. In such an abstract circle of trading, in which goods and services are substitutable in terms of price, environmental problems are perceived as "tradeoffs" to be captured by markets or, when markets fail, by experts who can get the prices of things right.

This approach — which regards all environmental problems as problems of efficient resource allocation — neglects the general problems of aggregate resource depletion and the limited capacity of natural systems to carry the macroeconomy as a whole. Daly suggests the image of a boat that sinks when it is overloaded even though everyone in it has allocated his weight in an "optimal" or "efficient" way. The representation of nature as the boat that carries us — rather than a star that guides us or the materials we have on board — offers an important metaphor to supplement familiar images of "Nature" and "environment."

The Challenge to the Humanities

In a remarkable passage toward the beginning of *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* (1849), Henry David Thoreau writes:

Late in the afternoon we passed a man on the shore fishing with a long birch pole, its silvery bark left on, and a dog at his side, rowing so near as to agitate his cork with our oars, . . . ; and when we had rowed a mile as straight as an arrow, with our faces turned towards him, and the bubbles in our wake still visible on the tranquil surface, there stood the fisher still with his dog, like statues under the other side of the heavens, the only objects to relieve the extended meadow; and there would he stand abiding his luck, till he took his way home through the fields at evening with his fish. Thus, by one bait or another, Nature allures inhabitants to all her recesses.

Among the writers of pre-Civil War America, Thoreau dealt most subtly with the relation between nature and our economic needs. The last sentence of this passage, for example, points out that we discover nature's secrets not only when we contemplate its beauty and power but also when we try to wrest a living from it. Today, science and technology take us to recesses in nature undreamed of in Thoreau's time. Yet the "bait" with which nature lures us to split the atom or break the genetic code is much the same as that which brought the fisherman to the river.

Thoreau's description of the scene on the riverbank reflects a sense of proper proportion between human-



ity, technology, and nature. Now that humanity has increased vastly in number and our technology has increased greatly in power, our problem from an economic as well as ethical and aesthetic perspective is to maintain proper proportion between economic activity and the natural world. Our task is not simply to control nature but to control ourselves so that the human economy can fit appropriately within the natural one.

It is easy to read a preservationist message in the famous remark in chapter two of *Walden* that "a man is rich in proportion to the number of things he can afford to let alone." In its context, however, this statement also suggests that from an economic point of view we must maintain intact the resources on which we depend. The fisherman, in satisfying his needs, does not destroy the river; he leaves it as he found it for another day. Similarly, we increase our wealth when we bring economic activity into a sustainable relationship with nature, for example, by renewing the resources we deplete and by maintaining the functioning of the ecological systems on which we depend.

An important challenge to the humanities in our time is to show us how we may regard nature not simply as a system of resources or raw materials for our use or, at the other extreme, as a preserve apart from economic life, but as the habitat in which we

and all other species live. The task of developing nature as habitat has been the traditional work of human culture.

The word "culture" derives from *colere* — to cultivate, to dwell, to care for, and to preserve. The attitude of loving care is the lesson the humanities can teach. The writers, artists, and theologians of the nineteenth century taught us to appreciate and revere the loveliness and power of nature, i.e., the beautiful and the sublime. We must now learn how to respect the complex and sometimes fragile ecological systems that support the diversity of life, including our own. If we must abandon the preservationist ideal of a pristine nature from which humanity is excluded, we must at the same time resist the conservationist view of nature as a mere resource for humanity's exclusive benefit.

—Mark Sagoff

Among the sources used in preparation of this article are Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Nature," in *Essays: Second Series* (Merrill Publishing Company, 1969); Perry Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness* (Harper & Row, 1964); Gifford Pinchot, *The Fight for Conservation* (Doubleday, 1910); Samuel Hays, "The Mythology of Conservation," in Henry Jarrett, ed., *Perspectives on Conservation* (Johns Hopkins Press, 1966); Herman Daly, "Toward an Environmental Macroeconomics," *Land Economics* 67 (1991).

Rights Past, Present, and Future

As we witness the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the growing assertion of ethnic and nationalistic claims in opposition to existing political boundaries, we encounter a striking phenomenon. At the same time as states come apart along ethnic and cultural lines, political rhetoric comes together under the once exclusively Western liberal banner of rights, freedom, and democracy. What are we to make of this historic convergence?

There is much to be learned about the contemporary rhetoric of rights from philosophic inquiry into fundamental human interests and liberties. But rights must also be viewed as historical achievements, as protections — devised and tested through time and practice — against many of the worst evils that can befall human beings, and especially those they can inflict on one another. From this standpoint, a key task of both practical philosophy and political debate is to reflect on these products of history: to search for underlying commonalities, to explore ambiguities of existing rights, to inquire whether, given added experience and changed circumstances, the purposes that initially guided the construction of particular rights might now warrant their extension or alteration.

Contemporary discussions of rights are shaped by a complex historical inheritance. The post-Reformation religious wars serve as a useful point of departure. Three different responses to this turbulent period have helped constitute our understanding of rights. To begin with, doctrinal clashes had helped spark an outburst of cruelty that shocked Europe. Leading humanists, chief among them Montaigne, reacted (in Judith Shklar's formulation) by "putting cruelty first" — that is, by identifying cruelty as the prime vice, by focusing on the fear cruelty engendered as the core evil, and by attempting to shape new political understandings and institutions that would reduce the amount of cruelty and fear in the world. This focus on cruelty is echoed in the Eighth Amendment's prohibition of cruel and unusual punishment, and it makes a dramatic reappearance as one of the Atlantic Charter's "four freedoms" — freedom from fear — in response to the twentieth-century renewal of doctrinally-driven brutality.

A second response to religious warfare was an enhanced focus on the value of human life and the formulation of rights of self-preservation. The locus classicus is Hobbes, but life is first among Locke's triad

("life, liberty, and property") as well, and it figures prominently in both the Declaration of Independence and the Fifth Amendment.

A third response to the wars of religion was the development of doctrines of toleration, rights of religious conscience, and the conception of a sphere of privacy, free from government interference, of which religion was the first (and is arguably still the most important) occupant. The influence of Locke's view on the First Amendment — indeed, on American constitutionalism generally — can hardly be overestimated.

The impact of Protestantism on the development of rights theories extended far beyond these responses to religious conflict. In its more radical forms, Protestantism preached the fundamental equality of human beings and translated this principle into a consensual theory of legitimacy. In our time Gregory Vlastos has defended a secularized version of this argument, in the form of a distinction between the intrinsic equality of human worth and the various inequalities of individual merit and accomplishment.

Parallel but equally important developments were occurring in the society and economy of early modern Europe: in particular, the breakdown of feudal and aristocratic systems under various pressures, and their gradual replacement by conceptions of property as fungible individual holdings. The causal relation of historical and doctrinal change in this area has been subject to endless debate. Suffice it to say that by Locke's *Second Treatise*, an enormously powerful revision of medieval property theory had made its appearance, in which full-blown property rights were grounded in self-ownership and labor and were limited only modestly by the rightful claims of others and by the valid acts of consent-based representative governments. While the Declaration of Independence famously replaces the property leg of Locke's tripod with the more general pursuit of happiness, property rights binding on the national government reappear strongly in the Fifth Amendment, in language to be repeated and ultimately applied to the states through the Fourteenth.

The encounter between systems of property rights and the dynamics of market economies, which roughly spanned the century between the 1830s and the 1930s, engendered important codicils to Locke's initial bequest. In England, liberal thought after Mill developed ideas of what we would now call welfare rights and reconceived the relation between individual holdings and the common good. In the United States, the Progressive movement espoused a collectivist, Hamiltonian doctrine of government economic policy, a move that laid the intellectual foundation for the New Deal. The ensuing tension between the moral

logic of individual holdings and of the general welfare has continued to characterize American politics and jurisprudence.

The sea of rights has been fed by two other tributaries in the two centuries since the American Revolution. One is Kant's understanding of individual autonomy and dignity, which in our time has influenced conceptions of rights from Robert Nozick on the libertarian right to Jurgen Habermas on the participatory left. John Rawls, surely the most influential liberal theorist of our time, has moved decisively in the past decade toward a more Kantian understanding of the moral foundations of the state.

The final source of the rights tradition is a conception of liberal individuality, shaped in response to the rise of liberal societies. It has three branches. One, flowing from von Humboldt to Mill and de Tocqueville, focuses on the social conditions for the preservation of human distinctiveness against the weight of egalitarian "mass society." Another is the more distinctively American heroic-Romantic tradition of Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman, which sees a rights-based democratic society as the arena within which various dramas of individuality may be enacted. A third, developed most fully by the British philosopher Bernard Williams, sees personal character and integrity as paramount. The point of our life, Williams argues, is to lead it as a distinct person with commitments to which we must hold fast, on pain of sacrificing what gives identity and meaning to life. From this standpoint, the purpose of moral theory and political institutions is to safeguard, so far as possible, the space within which these concrete individual life-projects can be adopted and carried out.

The Content of Rights: Current Consensus

These historical sources have contributed to a wide-ranging (but far from comprehensive) contemporary consensus in English-speaking countries, Western Europe, and many emerging democracies, concerning the content of the rights we may claim and exercise.

(1) A right to life is generally acknowledged, although, according to the Fifth Amendment, life may be forfeit (as may liberty and property) under certain conditions. Contemporary controversy over the right to life revolves around its scope and reach. "Pro-choice" and "pro-life" advocates disagree about whether fetuses are "persons" within the meaning of the right. Those who favor the death penalty point to the language of the Bill of Rights, while those who oppose it argue that the right to life cannot be squared with the state's taking of life.

(2) Also subject to general agreement is a range of rights of personal protection: against slavery and personal servitude; against cruel and unusual punishment and torture; against arbitrary searches, arrest, imprisonment, and seizure or confiscation; and against invasions of religious, intellectual, and expressive freedom. (There is, to be sure, debate at the margin of some of these protections. For example, does the right of free religious exercise allow Christian



Scientists to refuse medical treatment for their children in life-threatening cases? Does freedom of expression protect all instances of pornographic, racist, or abusive communications?)

(3) These rights of personal protection are bolstered by the right of all persons to the equal protection of the laws and by the various rights that define and help ensure fair trials.

(4) Even if there is no general right to (or presumption in favor of) liberty, rights secure a wide range of particular liberties: among them, the freedoms to travel, to marry or not marry, to choose and follow a profession, to associate with others, to own and freely dispose of personal property. Taken together, these rights not only secure areas of liberty but also provide concrete opportunities for the "pursuit of happiness" invoked in the Declaration of Independence. Many liberty-rights, of course, engender problems of application. Is the right to travel infringed by foreign policy limitations on access to terrorist nations? Is the right to marry infringed by particular state definitions of marriageable partners?

(5) Finally, rights of participation help both to secure and protect all other rights and to ensure that government remains rooted in the consent of the people, as the principles of liberal legitimacy require. These rights include: fair access to citizenship for all residents within a political jurisdiction; the equal treatment of all citizens; free political speech and assembly and the meaningful ability to bring grievances before public authority for redress; the receipt of all information needed to carry out the activities of citizenship; and a fair opportunity to gain offices of public trust and responsibility.

The Content of Rights: Current Controversies

As we have seen, even well-established rights give rise to controversies over their application. Other rights are more controversial still; their very existence is in dispute.

(1) Above and beyond particular liberties and immunities, is there a "right of privacy" that protects individuals against public interference in, for example, matters of sexual orientation, practice, and expression? Within U.S. constitutional adjudication, this question has arisen in areas such as contraception and homosexuality, and has frequently revolved around interpretations of the Ninth Amendment. But the issue is much broader and older than the public conflicts of the past quarter-century. It found classic expression in Mill's much-discussed distinction between self- and other-regarding action. It resurfaced in the Hart-Devlin debate about the enforcement of morals. And it continues to roil the waters of American politics today. Partisans of privacy rights appeal to equal respect for each individual and to mistrust of government intrusion; opponents insist not only that local majorities have rights to defend their own moral conceptions, but also that liberal society cannot safely be as latitudinarian in matters of sexual conduct as the partisans believe.

(2) A second contested right is that of property. The modern form of this contest is rooted in the European conflict between classical liberalism and social democracy, and in the parallel American conflict between laissez-faire and Progressive nationalism. Today, some philosophers affirm a far-reaching right of property while others either deny such a right or place it on the shifting sands of social utility. Questions of "personal" property (housing, transportation, clothing, and the like) are uncontroversial. The issue is debated along two other dimensions. Some affirm, while others deny, that there is a right to private ownership of the means of production. And some advance, while others resist, the proposition that the typical activities of the modern regulatory state amount to public "taking" of private property without just compensation, and thus to practical nullification of a core moral entitlement.

(3) A third area of dispute concerns "welfare rights" — guaranteed entitlements to basic levels of material provision and opportunity. This category of proposed rights emerged in the European struggle to address some of the unwanted consequences of market economies. It was crystallized in Articles 23 through 26 of the post-war Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which enumerated guarantees of employment, material decency, adequate leisure, and education. It surfaced in the United States in the 1960s and 1970s in the effort to incorporate some social minimum into the Fourteenth Amendment.

Amidst a rather murky debate, three points seem evident. First, unlike other kinds of interests protected by rights, the ability of governments to secure individual material welfare is dependent to a considerable degree on each country's overall level of material well-being.

Second, whatever their standing in liberal theory, minimum welfare guarantees cannot easily be located in (or crammed into) the Bill of Rights, or indeed any other provisions of the U.S. Constitution as it now stands.

Third, while welfare is not a free-standing and independent claim within the U.S. constitutional framework, specific welfare provisions may enjoy a kind of derivative status as the means needed to carry into practice the rights that are guaranteed explicitly or by clear implication. The right to public provision of legal counsel for indigent defendants is one clear case. More broadly, it might well be argued that citizenship guarantees are devalued unless all persons are given the opportunity to equip themselves to exercise the privileges and responsibilities of citizenship. From this perspective, access to education verges on an implied derivative right for all.

A final observation. Liberal conceptions of citizenship stress the duty of independence — the obligation of all (unimpaired) adults to provide for themselves and their families. In modern market economies, the individual's ability to fulfill this duty is in part a function of circumstances outside each person's control (as became painfully evident during the Great

Depression). From this standpoint, entitlements to collective material provision might well be regarded as latent and contingent — that is, as activated if and when economic circumstances make it impossible for individuals to achieve full independence through their own efforts.

The Bearers of Rights: Current Controversies

The central, least problematic case for the analysis of rights is the normally developed adult human being. Matters become more complex when we move to what Kent Greenawalt has called "borderlines of status": children, the handicapped, fetuses, animals, and even vegetation and inanimate nature. Each of these cases has given rise to complex and emotionally charged debates. No one doubts that children and the handicapped have important rights; the chief difficulty is rather to define the rights of normal adults (if any) that members of these categories lack and conversely the rights (if any) peculiar to them. The question of fetal rights is central to the intractable abortion debate. Proponents of animal rights have tended to focus on animals' capacity to feel pleasure and pain and to argue that they therefore possess the same right to have their subjective sensations taken into account as do human beings. Rights questions involving plants and inanimate objects have come to the fore with the rise of environmental concerns, though in these case most theorists believe that moral categories other than rights are more useful and revealing.

A final issue, heatedly debated in the controversy over affirmative action, is whether groups as well as individuals may reasonably be regarded as rights bearers. A remote antecedent of this debate is the distinction, evident in the Declaration of Independence, between the rights of individuals and of "peoples." The document's opening sentence proclaims the necessity of dissolving the political bands connecting one *people* with another. Later, the right of altering or abolishing forms of government is assigned to the people as a whole. For current purposes, the key point is that a "people" is not necessarily coextensive with the full citizen-body of

an existing political community; communities may include several peoples, linked politically.

This transition from individuals to subnational peoples is critical because the Declaration is not simply invoking a Lockean right of revolution; it is establishing the groundwork for a new political community. The object is not to alter or abolish Great Britain's form of government, but rather to separate from it. There must, then, be some ground on which a subnational community can invoke a right of separation, based in part on special bonds of birth, affection, and memory. That is why the colonists appealed to their "British brethren" on grounds of history and consanguinity as well as justice. The "necessity" of the separation of peoples announced at the beginning of the Declaration is explained at the end as the attenuation of affective ties between them. The collapse of Canada's Meech Lake accords and the recrudescence of subnational ethnic loyalties throughout Europe may well provide new arenas in our time for such acts of political self-assertion, and for tests of their validity.

Conclusion

Disputes over the content and bearers of rights are likely to figure centrally in the politics of the next century, here and abroad. What is perhaps most remarkable, though, is the growing globalization of the discourse of rights: the mounting tendency of individuals and peoples to couch their claims in terms rooted in European history and long central to America's political identity. Whether this trend is the harbinger of a global moral community, or a prelude to the unraveling of stable political institutions and national communities, we do not yet know.

—William A. Galston

This essay is excerpted from "Practical Philosophy and the Bill of Rights," forthcoming in *A Culture of Rights: The Bill of Rights in Philosophy, Politics, and Law — 1791 and 1991*, edited by Michael J. Lacey and Knud Haakonssen (Cambridge University Press, 1991).



Multicultural Education

"In 1492 Columbus sailed the ocean blue now we say for a fact, he did invade the Arawak." It's not the rhyme I learned in school, but, then, my schooling was BME — Before the Multicultural Era.

Multicultural education makes headlines these days, but it is not a new idea or policy. One book on the subject several years ago characterized the debate about it as already "interminable." Multicultural education has been official national educational policy in Australia, Canada, and Great Britain for more than a decade, and in this country it has been a part of state education frameworks, college accreditation rules, and federal education policy since as early as 1972. Implementation and practice lag behind mandate and theory, however, and it is only in more recent years that momentum has built for quite specific classroom interventions and that effective coalitions have matured around a number of contentious programs.

It is very hard to separate the wheat from the chaff in the multicultural argument. The core concepts and ideas in multiculturalism allow for quite divergent interpretation and development. As a consequence, very different programs and aims get called "multicultural," embracing quite different pedagogical strategies and theories, and supported by quite different educational and social diagnoses. Moreover, matters are further complicated by the fact that arguments about multicultural education often cannot be disentangled from the larger political wars in this country about affirmative action, ethnic representation, and group entitlements.

Described most simply, multicultural education trains children to live in a multicultural society. The fact that in the next century forty percent of American students will be minorities and ninety-five percent of their teachers will be white speaks to the double aim of multiculturalism: (1) to help teachers understand and communicate with students who come from different cultural backgrounds, and to guide changes in curriculum and school routine, so that differences in race, language, religion, and folkways don't become barriers to student success, and (2) to create in students from diverse backgrounds mutual understanding and respect, so that as citizens they both appreciate the pluralism in American life and cherish the common political values that sustain it. Multicultural education would seem on this account both desirable and inevitable.

Why, then, the headline-making controversies? There are two sources of dispute in multicultural education. The first arises out of multiculturalism's central aim, which encourages and supports cultural difference contained in a larger framework of common political commitments. This goal of diversity within unity is inherently in tension with itself and will

always generate disagreements about how much cultural difference is compatible with common political core values, and how common the core must be.

The Vocabulary of Multiculturalism

The second source of controversy is not inherent in multiculturalism but arises out of special ways of conceiving and expressing its goals. The current school curriculum is too *Eurocentric*, according to multiculturalists. Students have to be taught to avoid *ethnocentric* judgments about other cultures. America must reject the ideal of *assimilation* for its cultural communities and embrace *pluralism*. Behind this language lurk many snares and pitfalls. For one thing, it is often used, or perceived, as code for other language. "Eurocentric" means "arrogant;" "pluralism" means "on our terms, not yours;" "ethnocentric" means "chauvinistic;" and so on. In the larger cultural wars disputants give and take offense with this vocabulary. More important, however, than controversial formulations are the differing special conceptions of multiculturalism that can march behind them.

The most slippery term of all is "culture" itself, which has the accordion-like capacity to expand or contract to suit any occasion. We think of culture most readily in the context of a people with a distinct language, customs, and history. Certainly, a principal stimulus of multicultural education is the presence in the United States of many immigrant communities. The idea of culture gets extended from this context to cover, as well, groups like African-Americans whose special history and self-identification set them apart somewhat from the rest of the population. Finally, "culturally different" also encompasses organized "alternative" or "counter-cultural" groups such as gays and lesbians, feminists, and others.

The common thread running through these different examples is group self-identification. People explicitly and self-consciously identify themselves as African-Americans, evangelical Christians, gays, or Irish, and demand that this identity receive social acknowledgement and respect. Multiculturalism might more accurately be described as *multi-groupism*, its pluralism extending to nearly all important differentia involved in self-identification. Naturally enough, controversy about appreciation of, and mutual respect for, "cultural difference" is bound to emerge when the "differences" stretch to include values, practices, and beliefs whose acceptability and respectability are socially contested.

Next, consider "assimilation" and "pluralism." Multiculturalism repudiates assimilation as an ideal. Even the best multicultural writings, however, do an inadequate job of characterizing assimilation. One leading work initially describes minorities who

assimilate to the majority culture as undergoing "complete abandonment of their cultural differences." Within a few pages, however, its author is endorsing *some* assimilation for minorities but not too much. The paradigm case of undesirable assimilation is easy enough to tease out of multiculturalism: it is changing or hiding central and valued aspects of one's history and identity to conform to a dominant style or fashion, under threat of social devaluation or exclusion if one doesn't. So, for example, the immigrant changes his name, learns English, adopts prevailing conventions of dress, entertainment, habitation, diet, and religious observances because he particularly wants to, but in order not to suffer hindrances and discrimination. If we define pluralism in contradiction to this paradigm of assimilation, then surely pluralism is the better ideal but then the contrast between assimilation and pluralism is uninformative. "Pluralism" will turn out to encompass a continuum of nonconforming behavior ranging from retaining one's "foreign" name to demanding social validation of one's membership in the North American Man-Boy Love Association. Different multiculturalisms will mark different cutting-off points along that continuum. Not all socially non-conforming behavior can be approved, nor should all conforming behavior be deplored.

One requirement of "pluralism" is that school curricula reflect the cultural diversity of the nation. The heritages and experiences of minorities, women, and previously marginalized groups should have a respected place in the texts, lessons, and activities of the school. One common multicultural justification for this requirement is pedagogical: minority children will develop better self-esteem from seeing their heritages acknowledged and appreciated. Heightened self-esteem, in turn, will translate into better school performance for these children. Multicultural writings seldom offer a persuasive account of the bases of self-esteem or its relation to performance. Even so, improving self-esteem is multiculturalist gospel.

A quite distinct justification for the representation of formerly excluded groups in the curriculum derives from multiculturalism's civic aim of creating in students mutual understanding and respect. Exclusion from the curriculum represents a kind of invisibility that officially signals insignificance, inequality, inferiority. Children can't make an effort to understand what is not there to be understood, or to respect what isn't treated as worthy of notice. Finally, a third ground for representation in the curriculum is simple fairness. Children ought not feel they have been left out or ignored, even if they are not thereby harmed.

The Varieties of Multiculturalism

The curriculum should represent various social and cultural groups, but from whose point of view? Two answers to this question divide multiculturalism into "integrationist" and "separatist" versions. A notable defender of the integrationist version is Diane Ravitch. In her view, multiculturalism aims to "expand the understanding of American culture into a richer and

more varied tapestry." It "seeks a richer common culture." But a richer, expanded story of America remains a story — a story told from a unified or dominant point of view, a "Eurocentric view" in the eyes of many separatists, and that is unacceptable to them. The various cultural communities in the United States must be represented in the curriculum in their own voices, from their *own* point of view.

Tangled up in this debate are several important epistemological issues. What we believe is what we see, and what we see is a matter of perspective. Because there are many possible perspectives on an issue, our beliefs about it are likely to be partial and flawed unless we take pains to factor in the view from vantage points not our own. Through a social process of mutual discussion and testing, we can work toward *constructed* points of view that filter out particularistic biases and limitations, as much as this is possible, and from which widely acceptable judgments can be made. In actual practice, socially evolved points of view can fail to be as comprehensive or synthetic as they might or pretend to be, and may need the addition of previously excluded voices. In this spirit, the integrationist multiculturalism of Ravitch aspires to the reconstruction of the American story.

Those who reject her project and insist that each group should be represented in the school curriculum by its own perspective might do so for two very



different reasons. The *weak separatist* might believe that Ravitch's project is ultimately the right one but not practicable here and now. The "official" American story is so entrenched and so one-sided that any "corrective" enrichments from excluded points of view are bound to be subverted into mere emendations and embellishments, indeed, subverted even into buttresses for the story's main themes. For the present, previously excluded points of view need their own undiluted voices, their own uncompromised forums.

A *strong separatist*, in contrast, would repudiate the very aspiration for a reconstructed common story of America and Americans. There is no common perspective to be found, there are only diverse independent

perspectives. Strong separatism poses a radical challenge to Ravitch's project but at the same time, ironically, seems to weaken the argument for adding new voices to the curriculum. Consider the case of Christopher Columbus: did he discover America or invade it? From the perspective of fifteenth century Europe, he discovered it. From the perspective of the Arawak and other indigenous American populations, he invaded it. As descendants of the European immigrants of America most of us take (or took) the perspective of Europe. Why should we give it up or modify it? Because it is inadequate in some way? Saying it is amounts to measuring it against something outside itself, some more comprehensive and better point of view.

However, the strong separatist denies there are any overarching perspectives, just *other* perspectives. Now, no other perspective can claim to supersede our own merely by being *other*. If an Arawak-centered perspective is no better than a Eurocentric perspective or no part of a more comprehensive synthesis, why bother to re-write the books on poor Columbus? The ironic implication of strong perspectivism is that the label "Eurocentric" ceases to be a charge, complaint, or criticism; it becomes merely a description.

The issues embroiled in the arguments between integrationists and separatists re-emerge in the question whether multiculturalism should actively preserve cultural differences or merely acknowledge and respect them as it carries out other educational aims, including educating students in a common civic culture. Multiculturalism's leitmotif, of course, is the value of cultural diversity, but the argument for explicit preservationist policies in schools requires premises that go beyond that value. Religious diversity, for example, is valued in the United States but the public schools are not thought the appropriate agents for preserving it.

Not only do multiculturalists disagree over issues about perspective and preservation, they disagree over their theories of society and their pedagogical assumptions. A liberal, integrationist multiculturalism like Ravitch's looks for common ground among students and cultures upon which to build shared and deepened commitments to the political and moral ideals in the "official" American creed. Our history's checkered record with respect to the ideals of justice, equality, the common good, political participation, personal and communal liberties, and the like is not downplayed, nor are serious contemporary social problems ignored; but they are studied to illuminate the meaning and implications of the credal values.

More radical multiculturalists reject some or all of the liberal approach. The history of groups in our country, they argue, has to be understood in terms of

domination and subordination; the "official" norms and self-understandings of American society must be seen as the "social constructions" of dominant groups to "legitimize" their domination; and the most important "problem" in American society should be reckoned to be its "institutionalized" racism. Now, there is an important duality in these claims. The radical might be proposing that multicultural educators base their pedagogy on an understanding of American society in terms of domination/subordination, social construction of knowledge, and institutional racism, or she might be proposing that their pedagogy teach students in these terms.

The radical's *theory* of social relations in the United States is, of course, itself controversial. It means to be since it sets itself in opposition to the "ideological mystifications" of the common view of things. The radical's *pedagogy* is, then, doubly controversial. Even if the radical's concepts best explain American life, it doesn't follow that they are the best, or even appropriate ones, for bringing children to an accurate understanding of society or one another. They may simply be too divisive or confusing as a device for educating young children. One need not reject the radical's theory in order to reject his pedagogy.

Multicultural education, then, can generate controversy along several axes: integrationist/separatist, preservation/acknowledgment, theory/pedagogy, and others as well. There would be much to debate about multiculturalism were its various proposals all delivered to us in limpid, precise, and economical prose. But they aren't. Often written in a numbing "education-speak," they frequently blur or ignore crucial distinctions, erect straw men, and use tendentious definitions. Still, multiculturalism is an idea whose century has come. It behooves all of us, in good pluralist fashion, to add our voices to the debate.

—Robert Fullinwider

This essay draws from Sohan Modgil et al., eds., *Multicultural Education: The Interminable Debate* (Falmer Press, 1986); James Lynch, *Multicultural Education: Principles and Practices* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986); Diane Ravitch, "Multiculturalism," *The American Scholar* 59 (Summer 1990), pp. 337-54; Donna M. Gollnick and Philip C. Chin, *Multicultural Education in a Pluralistic Society* 3rd Ed. (Merrill Publishing Company, 1990); Christine I. Bennett, *Comprehensive Multicultural Education: Theory and Practice* (Allyn and Bacon, 1986); Christine Sleeper, ed., *Empowerment Through Multicultural Education* (SUNY Press, 1991); and Anthony DePalma, "The Culture Question," Calvin Sims, "World Views," and Isabel Wilkerson, "Blacks Look to Basics," all in *The New York Times Education Life*, November 4, 1990, pp. 22ff.



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